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GARDEN OF SPICES

A. KEITH FRASER



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Keith Fraser

A GARDEN OF SPICES

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A GARDEN OF SPICES

BY

A. KEITH FRASER

"Were plants ne'er tossed by stormy wind,
Their fragrant spices who could find?"



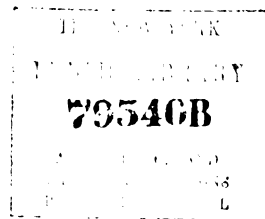
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TO ALL
KNIGHTS OF THE SILVER HAIR
WHO LOVE
LITTLE CHILDREN

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE GARDEN OF SWEET MEMORIES . . .	9
II THE DEPARTURE OF THE DRAGON . . .	19
III THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOW . . .	28
IV WHERE THE RIVER DIVIDES . . .	40
V LADIES OF THE KITCHEN . . .	53
VI THE SECRET OF THE WATERS . . .	70
VII A DAY OF SOLEMN THINGS . . .	84
VIII A LITTLE SACRAMENT . . .	102
IX GRANDFATHER, THE ELDER . . .	119
X A KNIGHT-ERRANT . . .	145
XI THE LONDON LADIES . . .	157
XII THE MAGNETISM OF HENDRY . . .	178
XIII THE SORROWFUL WAY . . .	189
XIV LIKE AS A FATHER . . .	205
XV IN THE GLOAMING. . .	217
XVI THE CLOSING OF THE GATES . . .	236
XVII SCOTTISH MARTYRS . . .	248
XVIII FAREWELL TO BARBARISM . . .	268
XIX ROSES AND FORGET-ME-NOTS . . .	277
XX A PASSING BELL . . .	289
AFTERMATH . . .	302

A GARDEN OF SPICES

A GARDEN OF SPICES

CHAPTER I

THE GARDEN OF SWEET MEMORIES

THE wind blows softly from the south in the garden where I lie all day. Roses and stocks are blooming all around me. Sweet-peas are fluttering like butterflies in the breeze. Stately Madonna lilies stand sentinels by the gate.

In the evening, when the tide is low, and the bees have ceased their humming, and the moon shines in a silver pathway over the sea, I still lie here, in an atmosphere heavy with the fragrance of sweet-scented stocks, and evening primroses opening their pale chalices to the moonbeams. It is a garden of sweet scents.

Then, sometimes, there comes upon me a great longing, and my heart aches with the memory of past loves. I cry aloud with the sacred poet to the north wind to awake and blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow out.

And from the north there comes a zephyr laden with perfumes, and lo! there is thyme, and sweet marjoram, and rosemary, and—alas!—rue. And the garden from which they come lies in the north and is flanked by purple hills. It is the garden of sweet memories.

Between the currant-bushes and up the grassy paths there flits the figure of a little child. A solitary, old-fashioned little child in a cotton frock, pin-spotted with lilac, a lilac sunbonnet dangling by its strings down her back, and ruddy, corkscrew curls of an auburn shade clustering and bobbing round her head.

She is generally alone and yet never lonely. Who could be lonely with birds and bees and butterflies and caterpillars all around? I say caterpillars advisedly. There were such dainty speckled beauties on the gooseberry-bushes, shimmering in their robes of green. They went into such charming families when gathered into a little toy sugar-scoop. Fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, even tiny babies sometimes amongst them. To an only child, with none—or, at least, only one—of all these things belonging to her, the collective families made fascinating history, and many stories of romance clustered around the

caterpillars. (Even now I hesitate, as I pick a green caterpillar or two off my roses, and say to myself, "There's Annie, and John, and James, and Peter——" and then stop short, ashamed to find that in my sober middle age, with the hair grown grey about my temples, I am making families of caterpillars tell stories, as in the old days.)

Sometimes, down the grassy path there strides the figure of a man looking for the child. A man of fine physique, tall, erect, and somewhat stately, albeit the thickly clustering rings of hair on his shapely head are silver-white, and his old-fashioned black silk bow tie and Gladstonian collar proclaim the gentleman of the old—and courtly—school.

He would call in a deep, mellow voice, "Where is she?" And then the child would come out from amongst the bushes with her caterpillars.

They would then wander away together, hand in hand, children both, for he who loves Nature is ever young. She with dreamy eyes not long opened to the glories of a beautiful world, he with his dark ones—dreamy too, misty a little with age—fixed on the purple hills, and beyond, where

the dim faces of his far-away youth haunted them.

They are both only shadows now, for both have long passed away. The man to become young with everlasting youth; the child—ah, well! she lies here in this southern garden, derelict, and the lot of the invalid is hers.

But this is a little tale of true love and so should be worth the telling. For the hearts in the north country are true as steel, although it may be that they lack some fluency in the expression of their deepest feelings. The love of a man for a maid is of perennial interest everywhere, but especially in a garden, from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Paradise, where true lovers meet again. And when its theme is the love of three men for one lucky maid (and she a little one), it should be better still.

I hardly know what name to call him who was her first love unless I call him "the Laird," which is the one by which he was best known. He had been "the young Laird" for many a day, to distinguish him from his father, the old one. Then he was promoted in late middle age, when the memory of his father had faded a little from the countryside, and "the Laird" he remained, till he



GARDEN OF SWEET MEMORIES 13

was no laird at all, and owned no land except what was waiting for him in the churchyard of his forefathers.

It is sad to relate that, even as the serpent frequented the Garden of Eden, so there was a dragon in this northern one. The Dragon was in human shape and of feminine gender. She wore a mob cap with frills on her jet-black hair, which was smoothly parted in the middle and plastered down on each side of her somewhat angular face. She had a hard mouth, a firm chin, and eyes that were sometimes green, and sometimes grey, and sometimes black, and could flash fire when they liked. And then they were very fearsome to behold.

In short, she was a nurse—or, to be more exact—a nurse-housekeeper of the old school. In her pocket she carried a pair of leathern “tawse,” and she believed in no spoiling of the child by sparing of the rod.

She also would come wandering out into the garden, knitting a long grey stocking, her grim, severe lips compressed till they looked but one straight line across her colourless face, and the children—at play, perhaps, with daisy-chains hung round their necks, or fuchsias, tied with

thread, dangling from their ears for ear-rings—would spring guiltily away from each other, and it would be difficult to say which face was the reddest, the grown-up man's or the child's.

She would give them a withering look and pass on, and the man would try to look dignified—a difficult matter when one is lying flat on one's back, covered with docken-seeds, with a wreath, perhaps, of ragged robin and corn-flowers twined amongst one's curls.

Sometimes they stole a march on her. Then they would slip out of the back door, and mounting Donald Dhu, a shaggy Highland pony, would gallop off together to the foot of the Grampians, to feast on nectar and wild strawberries. Donald Dhu on these occasions would quite enter into the spirit of the thing, and, snorting defiance at the Dragon, would shake his tawny mane and spring forward like a winged steed. In the heart of the cup-shaped moor, with the purple mountains standing guard all round, the two children would dismount, leaving Donald Dhu in the fairies' charge, and wander hand in hand amongst the heather with Dame Nature for their nurse.

For it was the Golden Age for them both. To the little maid it had come early, and would pass

early. To the man, in his vigorous old age, it had come late. Life had flitted past him with empty hands, till his child, who was not his own, had come across his path, and the latent paternity in his heart had been stirred into being.

They lunched by the cool trickle of a mountain spring. From his pocket there came a collapsible tumbler of tartan india-rubber, or, if it had been forgotten in the hurry of departure, there were his hands, large, strong, supple, the white hands of the gentleman, which, curved together, formed a fine drinking-cup fit for a lady. There were also oatcakes, done up in clean writing-paper, in his pocket, and skim-milk cheese, and what more would you have, with the air whistling through the crevices of the Grampians for a draught of champagne, and hunger for a sauce? Ambrosia, fit for the gods.

It would be long past dinner-time ere the truants returned home again, and, after handing Donald Dhu to his caretaker, on nearing the gable end of the house, where the Dragon sat sewing endless white seam by the kitchen window, there would be a marked change in their demeanour.

The child would slink with lagging footsteps

behind, while still clinging tightly to the firm wrinkled hand with the gold nugget ring on it. Her cheeks would blanch and her heart would beat a tattoo loud and fast.

The man would then straighten himself up and his well-knit limbs assume a stride. His lips were firm, his head well back, as he approached the Dragon.

"We have returned," he said firmly; "I am afraid we have torn this frock"—exhibiting a large jagged tear in the front breadth of the child's dress—"but it is only cotton, it will soon mend." (How like a man! Soon mend, indeed.) "We will have our dinner served in the study," he continued, and turned to walk away.

The Dragon opened her mouth to speak, and shut it again with a snap of unclenched teeth. She breathed rather than said, "Yes, sir." She had risen respectfully and dropped her white seam, but her lips were white with their rigid compression, and her downcast eyes showed flickers of lambent flame underneath. At least, so the child thought.

"Did you speak?" asked the Laird, wheeling round in response to a low murmur.

"I only said, sir," replied the Dragon, with

great meekness, "that Miss—Elspeth had missed her midday sleep."

She hesitated over the word, to which her tongue was somewhat unaccustomed, but he was so unmistakably the Laird that the Dragon was cowed and had even to treat the child with respect.

"She will have her sleep after dinner," he replied. "Take her to wash her face and hands and bring her to the study to dine with me."

Then he strode along the stone-flagged passage, which led from the large pleasant kitchen to the rest of the house, with loud clank of heel.

With soft step, and ominously controlled voice, the Dragon led the child away, washed her face and hands in silence, covered her tatters with a large white pinafore and pushed her, a few minutes later, in at the study door. So ominous was the silence, so vicious the push, that the child's spirit quailed. Not even the joys of a late afternoon dinner kept hot in the oven, with freshly fried potatoes, brought back the colour to her cheeks or the light to her eyes.

"You are tired, my dearie," said the gentle Laird, stretching a tender hand across the study table and taking the small freckled one in his

own. "You'll be better for a rest in your own little beddie."

He thought nothing of it when a watery smile was all his answer.

Dinner over, he rested quietly in his big study chair, a Greek tome on his knee, a gay crimson silk handkerchief spread over his silver curls. "She's very tired," he said, "she'll be the better for a sleep. The air of the Highlands is strong," and slipped off himself into the land of dreams.

Whilst upstairs, behind double baize doors, which screened the Dragon's haunts from the paths of men, there arose the heart-broken sobs of a motherless child and the sharp sound of the leathern tawse.

When King Solomon wrote that oft-quoted verse about the rod, he did not, in spite of his wisdom, know that rods are not in it compared with the Scottish instrument for training up a child in the way it should go.

But all this happened long ago, and, doubtless, a new and much-indulged generation knows it not.

CHAPTER II

DEPARTURE OF THE DRAGON

IT fell on a day, a bright summer day, when the corn was ripening fairly, that Davy McLelland brought a freshly painted cart up to the back door, drawn by Star—that fine steed on whose broad, brown forehead there shone a snow-white star of the first magnitude.

Davy looked with some pride at his cart with its brilliant colouring of blues and reds, his own neat brushwork. Inside, a layer of clean straw covered the floor. On both sides, planks covered with carpet stood on low trestles for seats. It was a chariot fit for a king.

Upstairs, the child Elspeth was being deftly robed for the road by Mistress Kate, the Laird's housekeeper. Now Mistress Kate was a comely and douce young woman about thirty, with a pleasant face, a bright smile, and crinkly hair of a flaxen shade that was never much tidier than the child's own refractory curls, for it would break out into big ripples and waves wherever it could. She was

undeniably a person to ask questions of, so, although questions were strictly forbidden, the child could not resist asking, while Mistress Kate with deft, quick fingers buttoned on a little white *piqué* pelisse and tied the broad ribbons of a big Leghorn hat under her chin.

"Where am I going to?"

"To the station," responded Mistress Kate, somewhat more blithely than the occasion warranted.

Then the child pondered a minute, for there were no signs of packing around.

"Who with?" she whispered.

"You'll see," whispered Mistress Kate back.

Davy was still admiring his fine handiwork when they came downstairs.

"Now lift her up, Davy, and there's a nice soft shawl for her to sit on."

So Davy swung the child up, remarking as he did so:

"What a fine, heavy little Miss ye are gettin'." Then grumbled aside to Mistress Kate. "If she's no' quick wi' her graund packin' she'll miss the train."

Then there suddenly appeared, dragging a box with some flutter of haste, the Dragon in her best

DEPARTURE OF THE DRAGON. 21

clothes. Her black bonnet was spangled with jet flowers, and the beads on her Sabbath jacket glittered in the sun with a shimmer of jet. In her hands she carried black kid gloves, to be struggled with later. She was flushed and her eyes were red. If dragons, like crocodiles, could weep, one would say she had been weeping.

She glanced rapidly at the seating of her little charge, and hauled in with one hand the tin box Davy handed up to her.

"We'll hae to mak' haste," he said, climbing quickly up to his perilous seat on the edge of the cart. "Trains'll no wait. Haud ticht, noo." And so, with a smart crack of the whip, a rattle of freshly painted cart-wheels on the cobble-stones of the yard, and gallop of Star to catch the train, they were off. With such haste, indeed, that the Dragon and the child fell in an ignominious heap beside the tin box in the straw, and took some time in the readjusting. Hens cackled and ducks flew in all directions out of their way. It was a royal departure.

After rumbling heavily over the bridge and rattling down a hill, Star slackened speed somewhat, and devoted himself to more quiet progress along the straight line of white road which

wended its weary miles to the station. The Dragon put on her gloves, carefully inflating them before she did so, and drawing the child to her other side, so that she should hear the conversation less, began to talk in a low voice to Davy.

At first nothing was audible but occasional snatches, such as "Taken ill last week." "No expected to live through the night." "Leaving a grand testimony behind him," interspersed with "Ay, ay," from Davy. "D'ye say that, woman?" and "Hoots! lots o' fouk get better;" by which the eavesdropper gathered that the Dragon was anticipating a bereavement.

Then the conversation became a little louder and more personal.

"A child of wrath," said the Dragon.

"Hoots! no. Ye're ower strict, woman."

"I dinna like leaving her," said the Dragon.

"Oh, the maister'll look aifter her fine," consoled Davy. "He's a graund man wi' the bairns."

"Him! A muckle bairn himsel'," retorted the Dragon, reverting back to her natural Doric in her contempt. "Juist a muckle bairn."

There was an interlude of silence here. Then the Dragon groaned again:

DEPARTURE OF THE DRAGON 23

"A child of wrath. A spoilt bairn. Father, grandfather, the Laird, all spoiling her."

"All except you," said Davy grimly.

"I try to do my duty," said the Dragon severely. "It is not easy. You know what King Solomon——"

"Hoots, woman, haud your wheesht! King Solomon was a gey lad himsel'. He cudna manage his ain hoose, let alane ither fouks."

The Dragon waxed wrathful at this disrespectful remark, and there ensued a long string of adjectives, of which the child of wrath (whom a sudden jerk of Star, in response to the crack of Davy's whip, had precipitated once more into the bottom of the cart) caught but a few.

Rude, obstinate, self-willed, lazy, sulky, bad-tempered—like the rest of the red-headed folks, curly hair too, which made it ten per cent worse—caring nothing for the Sabbath, disobedient, selfish. A veritable daughter of perdition surely. The Dragon harked back to ingratitude.

"Cares nothing for anybody, so doesn't care a bit about my going away."

"Mebbe she disna ken," mildly expostulated Davy.

Here the Dragon's eye fell upon the culprit plaiting straw in the bottom of the cart. She dragged her up by the arm suddenly, shook her, and set her down with a bump on the seat, clutching her hand firmly so that she should not go again, and addressed her point-blank:

"Are you sorry I am going away?"

Scottish-like, the child asked a question quietly in return.

"Is it for altogether?"

"I told you," groaned the Dragon to Davy. "She cares for nobody, not even for me who has done everything for her and been a mother to her all her days."

"Wheesht, wheesht, woman! Ye're sorry, are ye no?" Davy said, turning round in his seat to look at the small monster of depravity, "that yer kind nurse is going away for a month."

O, Davy, Davy, there was a twinkle in your eye when you said it!

The child gazed at him, but she said nothing. Long repression had taught her that silence is golden. In other words, she had learnt the melody of the closed mouth. Was she sorry? Not a bit of it. Glad, glad in every fibre of her small being. If a rift in the blue above us showed

DEPARTURE OF THE DRAGON 25

us a glimpse of Paradise, would we be sorry? No. A thousand times no. So she said nothing.

Davy turned his large body round so as to face her, and looked at her reproachfully.

"Say ye're sorry," he said. "I am sure ye are. Ye're sorry that your nurse's faither's deein', an' she's going away for mebbe a month, an' mebbe langer."

Now she knew. But she was *not* sorry. Not a bit of it. Like the young lambs upon the mountains, even so did her soul skip within her. A month! Joy of joys! In the harvest time too, with the Laird all to herself, and nobody, literally nobody, to find fault.

"Hae," coaxed Davy, handing her the reins. "Say ye're sorry, and I'll let ye drive the rest o' the road to the station noo."

She looked at the tempting reins, but did not attempt to take them. For this was bribery, and she was *not* sorry. She was glad, and to say she was sorry would be a lie, and she was only too well aware where liars went.

The Dragon snatched the reins angrily.

"Ye're like the rest, Davy, ay spoiling her. She's a bad girl and she's not sorry one bit. I ken her. She shall never drive me."

At that there was a quiver of the culprit's lips, and real tears welled up in her eyes.

"I am sorry, *now*," she said in a low voice. But I fear me it was over the loss of the reins she was sorry.

While this discussion had been going on, the reins hanging loose, and his master's back turned to him, Star had been taking things easy. He had helped himself to a low branch of birch hanging over the road, and between cannily chewing it, and flicking his tail to keep off the flies, had dropped into a funeral pace. He was leisurely walking over to the shadiest side of the road for coolness when Davy turned round again. At that moment a sharp puff of smoke showed the approach of the train out of a distant tunnel.

"Losh! we'll never catch it," cried Davy, lashing up his steed, and between rumble, and gallop, and clatter of tin box in the rear, there was no more time for conversation, and they dashed into the station in the same grand style they had left the farm-yard, reaching it simultaneously with the train. There was no time even for good-byes, and the tin box was nearly left behind in the commotion.

And behold! the Dragon's eyes were again

DEPARTURE OF THE DRAGON 27

dewy as she was bundled hastily into the last railway carriage, and it was a damp handkerchief which she waved from the window as she went out of sight. But the eyes of the child in the cart were dry.

Then from somewhere out of sight a gig came rattling up, with Donald Dhu dancing and curvetting after the departing train, and the Laird sitting smiling on the seat. There was a hasty transference enacted, and now with head erect, and Leghorn hat hanging rakishly in its most frequent place, down her back, the Child of Wrath held the reins with proud satisfaction, and Donald Dhu was soon trotting, with his two conspirators behind him, away down the ribbon-like stretch of road, bound for the open country with Elysium at the end.

And Davy, lying leisurely in his empty cart far behind them, chewing a straw for company, sang softly to himself with a pawky smile on his face as Star drew him leisurely homewards:

“Wha’ll be King but Charlie.”

As the Laird’s name was Charles it sounded very appropriate, and was a bit of dry humour on Davy’s part.

CHAPTER III

THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOW

AS into each life some rain must fall, so it seems to me that into each life there comes at some time or other a glimpse of Paradise. It comes generally in childhood, when the eyes are clear, and the spirit is untarnished with the stains of earth.

I saw a ragged, barefooted child once in the back streets of my own grey native town. Her face was blue and pinched with cold, the biting north wind whistled cruelly through the many openings of her tattered garments, her bare feet were covered with chilblains. But in her eyes there shone the peace of Paradise. She had found the end of a broken whisky bottle, and after filing its jagged edges on the granite curb was playing "peaver" with it. I do not know the English equivalent for the name of "peaver," nor do I know its mysteries, except that it is connected in some mystic way with the scores on the pavement.

THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOW 29

As she hopped backwards and forwards on one blue leg, pushing her bit of jagged bottle before her, she kept count, "Ane, twa, three, fower." Big flakes of snow fell on her face, but she heeded them not. I doubt if she even saw them. Turn and turn again. "Ane, twa, three, fower," as the snow fell faster and faster. Not till the pavement was covered and all its divisions obliterated did she desist. Then she ran "home" with a look of fear on her face. In the years to come that girl would look back upon "peaver" on an icy pavement as a game played in Paradise, and would never remember either the cold or the fear of what was to come after.

But to the child, Elspeth, whose lines were cast in pleasant places, and whose summers were spent in Arcady, there were vastly different glimpses to remember. Especially during that summer when there was no Dragon.

To wake in the morning and find, instead of a hard, severe face bending over you, a round, benignant one, probably with spectacles on, fresh from his morning reading. To be greeted with smiling looks instead of sour ones. To sally out in the early morning to look at the calves. To scatter corn amongst flying hens out of one's

pinafore. To breakfast on ham and eggs, instead of porridge, not only on the Sabbath but on every day of the week. To wander down the burn-side, and to be allowed—oh, joy of joys!—to take off one's shoes and stockings and dabble amongst the minnows with one's bare toes. To sit on a shepherd's plaid on the bank and listen, while clever male fingers twisted rushes into dolls' cradles (how did he learn, I wonder?), to thrilling tales of ancient Greeks and Romans, and glorious Scottish heroes, Wallace, Bruce, and the rest, with the burn tinkling a musical accompaniment all the time.

And then, best of all, to watch the Laird, his coat and waistcoat thrown off, his soft wideawake hat on the back of his curls, hard at work cutting clods on the bank where the burn was deepest with a big pocket-knife. What were they for? Watch him and you will see.

First he gathered big stones and placed them across the burn. Then he cut his turf and rolled it, packing it tightly between the stones. It took days in the making, and the sun was hot, but slowly it resolved itself into a dam. All this was because the child of his affections had expressed a desire to bathe. She should have a bathing-

THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOW 31

place then, fit for a queen, in the clear limpid water of the burn, with the surprised minnows playing hide-and-seek around her.

Then on one never-to-be-forgotten day in August, when the golden grain was whispering towards the water, and the meadow-sweet—that rival queen—scented the banks, they went down together for the disrobing. First the Laird deposited a brown-paper parcel on the bank at her feet, and retired with his newspaper to a little distance, where a bend in the burn hid him—and her—from view.

“You will come to me my dearie, if you can’t undo the buttons,” he said, as he disappeared. And the child gravely opened the parcel, and drew out a towel and a small white flannel night-gown. I think she managed all the buttons, and disrobed herself in the bright sunshine. Then she went to him to fasten the band of the night-gown. And behold! she was suddenly seized with a great fear. Like many older and wiser persons, the desire of her heart was within her grasp, and she shrank from it in terror of the unknown.

The shadows fell upon the water. It was deep—for her. It was undoubtedly cold.

"I'm frightened," she said, with a catch in her breath. "I want you to come too. I want you to bathe with me."

At that the Laird laughed.

"My dearie," he said, "it is not deep enough for me. When I bathe I like the river to swim in. This is but a fairy river, for a little fairy like yourself to bathe in."

"Oh, but I'm afraid," she said, trembling.

Then of course he took off his shoes and stockings (and the stockings and garters which he wore, after the fashion of his youth, were a great surprise to her), and, rolling his trousers up, held her hand and gently waded in with her to the bath.

It was very cold, and deeper than she liked, and she cried "Oh!" many times. Then she grew braver, and let go his hand to dab her curls with water, to prevent herself from taking cold, after the fashion of the Dragon at the seaside. That duty done she bobbed solemnly up and down, the nightgown swelling out round her like a balloon. Braver still, and with a splash she was in, swimming for dear life with her knees grating on the pebbles and her arms spread out like wings.

THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOW 33

Then the Laird laughed again and left her to herself, and, sitting down on the bank, timed her by his big silver watch.

And now there was no getting her out. The Laird said "Time's up" several times, and she cunningly made a great splashing, so that she could not hear. So he looked grave when she caught his eye, as she turned, laughing, for the last time.

"You must come out now," he said. It was a tone to be obeyed, and she, recognising it as such, came out at once.

But oh! the joy of that daily bath through the happy weeks that followed. To see Mistress Kate, blithe and smiling and crinkly-haired, take the dripping nightgown from them when they reached home, and hang it on the hedge to dry, with never a word of scolding for the extra work to either of them, was an awakening—a vision of what a good housekeeper ought to be.

And when at last the reapers came to cut the corn in that field by the bathing-place, so that there could be no more daily baths, well, there were other joys to take their place.

Surely it was a joy to ride backwards and forwards in the carts. Rattling in the empty ones,

tossed up like a pancake over the rough fields, with never a thought of headaches and digestive troubles waiting, with added years, round the corner. To ride back with dignity, like a real queen in her chariot, on the top of the rich, fragrant pile of golden grain, held on by the Laird's strong, loving arm. Those were the golden days indeed.

All too soon the harvest ended, only the last sheaf of corn, "the maiden," remained in the fields for "little Miss" to cut. She had hard work to cut it, for they would not give her a hook, still less a scythe, and the Laird's big pocket-knife was desperately blunt after so much turf-cutting. But at last it was done, and "the maiden" was carried home in triumph, to be tied with blue ribbons, and put in the place of honour for the Harvest Home that evening, and to keep there to bring good luck and a plenteous harvest for the ensuing year.

Never had Elspeth been in the country so late in the year, and she was never there again, so it was impressed very indelibly upon her memory. All her life she would never forget the evening of that Harvest Home, and would see the low, old-fashioned farm-kitchen, decorated with its

THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOW 35

brightly polished tin and copper utensils, its hams dangling from the oaken rafters, with all the bustle and commotion of preparation for the supper in the back kitchen, and the clearing of the front for the dance.

When they were all assembled, men, and maids, regular farm-hands and strays, the Laird and she, hand in hand, led off the first dance. She was unmistakably Queen of the Assembly, and I fear she was very proud. She shook out her diminutive skirts of white embroidered muslin, she fingered the necklace of pearl beads Mistress Kate had given her—never before had she been permitted to wear anything so elegant—and she tossed her curly mane, with its wreath of late honeysuckle round it, those curls which Mistress Kate could never twist into such stiff corkscrews as the Dragon, and she showed off very greatly. On every side there was admiration.

“Well done, little Miss!”

“Isn’t she a clever one?”

“Just like a little fairy dancing.”

It was enough to turn any child’s head. And so, when the Laird, having done his part in opening the dance, retired to his study, and the farm-hands danced reels to their hearts’ content, and

clamped with their heavy boots through the mazes of the country dances, shouting "Hooch!" with as much frequency as they liked, the child, Elspeth, jinked in and out amongst them, growing ever wilder and more excited as the night of dissipation grew longer.

When the fiddler paused and the dancers rested, holding up her tiny skirts, she danced *pas-de-seul*, with crimson cheeks and sparkling eyes, down the middle of the long kitchen for all to see. Many hand-clappings followed these displays.

It was in the middle of one of them that she suddenly became conscious of some adverse influence, as if a disapproving eye were watching her. She stopped a moment and looked round on all the kindly, smiling faces. No, there was no disapprobation there. Nothing but approval and admiration.

Then she tried to peer into the darkness of the long trance, or passage, which separated the kitchen from the rest of the house. The trance was dimly lit by a small hanging oil lamp, and in the darkness beyond there clustered the faces of some who did not dance—wives and mothers of the men and maids, whose dancing days were

THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOW 37

over. The adverse influence seemed to come from there.

Boldly she danced up to the dimness, fingering her pearls. All should own her sway. She was elated and excited with the evening's long triumph. It was now well past midnight.

She pranced gaily, and they made a way for her up the passage. She had nearly reached the end, when, from amongst the silent and dark spectators, a hand was suddenly stretched out—a hand like the hand of Fate, hard and knobby—and she was kidnapped. That is the only word for it. Through the door that led to the front hall, through another door leading up to the stone staircase. So swiftly, so silently, was it done that she was upstairs in the large room behind the baize doors before she was missed—before she barely had time to recognise her captor.

But in the light of a small chamber lamp she had now no difficulty in doing so. For there stood the Dragon, come back at the eleventh hour! How much had she seen of all that mincing and prancing? How much had she heard of the clapping and praise? From the flash of her eyes when the lamp was turned up, and the thunderclouds on her face—than which the crape on her

new dress was no blacker—the Dragon had seen everything! Grim and terrible she approached the trembling child. And as Fate with her shears cuts asunder the thread of our lives and shatters our idols before our eyes, so did the Dragon seize the pearl necklace, that emblem of pride, and holding it firmly in her strong hands, break the thread on the child's neck. Hither and thither in every direction ran the released pearls, and as she saw each one the Dragon stamped upon it, shivering its beauty into a thousand fragments of paltry crushed paste, even as our most cherished idols are shivered.

Then, turning to the child, she slapped her, first on one plump arm, then on the other.

“Set you up, indeed,” she said—slap—“with your awful pride”—slap—“and your mincing steps”—slap—“and your tinkling cymbals”—slap—“you'll go straight to the Father of Pride”—slap. And a great deal more that I think I shall not write, for it makes my heart sore even to think of it.

It was half an hour later before the Dragon went down again to the festivities, leaving the dethroned queen sobbing in her bed in the darkness as if her heart would break. Her sceptre

THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOW 39

was broken, her faded honeysuckle crown was thrown out of the window, her jewels were trampled upon, her kingdom was passed away, her poor, tired little body was worn out with pain and fatigue. Verily it is but an uneasy head that wears a crown!

Whilst far away in the kitchen there sounded the scuffling of the dancing feet and the merry laughter over the old country dance, "Sir Ronald MacDonald."

"A' yer richt feet in,
An' a' yer left feet oot,
Shake them a little within,
An' whirl yersels aboot.

Hey, Sir Ronald MacDonald,
And hey, Sir Ronald MacDhr-
Hey, Sir Ronald MacDonald,
We're a' roarin' fu'."

Which was not, strictly speaking, true as they were all absolutely sober. They were only enjoying themselves very thoroughly.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE THE RIVER DIVIDES

THERE was no garden belonging to the grey house in the square where the child, Elspeth, lived all the year round, with her father and the Dragon, in the town, except for the few halcyon weeks which she spent with the Laird in the country in the summer. Only a small paved yard at the back, surrounded by high houses, which could never by any possibility be called a garden. But there were others within reach. Nature's gardens, only a short way out of town, in wooded hills and by-paths. There was also the Garden of Sleep—a very beautiful one—lying high on a rocky tableland, where one could see the sun setting behind the purple peaks in the distance, till one felt as if the Pearly Gates which opened into Holy City itself were just beyond them.

There were several entrances into this beautiful garden, lying high above the grey town, where the river divides, and the Angels keep guard over its quiet inhabitants.

One, the main one, was often thrown wide back, and a policeman stood to guard it. Then there would come sometimes a great crowd of warriors in garbs of woe, sword-handles swathed in crape, and crape on sleeves, marching to the roll of muffled drums playing the Dead March, or the pibroch wailing "Lochaber no more." On a gun-carriage would follow the one who slept, with the accoutrements of his warfare pathetically grouped upon his coffin. And, if he had been mounted in the days of his strength, his horse would follow, with the empty saddle on his back and his master's empty boots dangling at the stirrups. And eyes, dimmed by the passing of the gun-carriage and the soul-melting music, would brim over at the pathetic figure of the dumb animal, grief-marked in every curve of his beautiful form, as he kept careful step with the muffled drums, his soft dark eyes with that strange look of despair in them, which is so often seen in the petted animal in the hour of human grief.

Sometimes Elspeth and the Dragon, on their usual Saturday afternoon's visit to the Garden of Sleep, went in by the gate, opening it far enough to admit them and closing it softly behind

them again. There must be no jarring noises in the cemetery. And here, let me add, the Dragon never scolded beyond a "Come now," in quiet accents of reproof.

And sometimes they went in by another gate, a small one, and paused for a minute by the bowling-green to watch the gentlemen playing bowls, as generations of bowlers had done ever since the days of King James, and probably long before. The Game of Life played so close beside the Game of Death.

But perhaps oftener still they went up a quiet road bordered by rocks and trees, with pleasant glimpses of picturesque landscape between, and, opening another small gate, landed at once in an expanse of smooth green sward peopled by statues of heroes. Some of them were in the attitude of preaching, and looked wild, denunciatory, as if warning of the wrath to come in forcible, though inaudible, words. Others were mild and benign in aspect. Some had rapt, upward expressions, as if they were holding communion with the unseen. Others were very humanly sympathetic in their appearance, smiling, as if telling of the Love of God to men. Many of them were martyrs for their faith.

Some carried Bibles in their hands, emblems of the sacred truths for which they had laid down their lives.

At the foot of one of the statues the Dragon and her little charge always paused in silence. The Dragon would look reverently up at the sculptured face, and her thin lips would move in a murmured prayer, for this was a martyred ancestor of her very own, and she paused here, as if to attune her soul to the spirit of the place before proceeding any farther. It was not exactly a prayer, of course. That would have savoured of Mariolatry. Let us call it, rather, a firm resolve. A resolve to do her duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call her, and to be faithful, till death, if necessary. For the Dragon was a woman of deeply religious views, and the spirit of the Covenanters was strong within her.

Elspeth had no martyrs amongst her ancestors, but she was a solitary child full of imagination, and at the gates she had always been met by Someone. It did not matter which gate they had gone in by. Someone always seemed to know when she was there. It was the spirit of her dead mother. To the lonely child, with the ache

of the motherless always in her little heart, it seemed as if her mother seemed to glide beside her and hold her hand in a gentle clasp—the mother's clasp. There is no other like it in the world. The hand holding hers might still to the material eye be the Dragon's hand—hard, knobby, bony, encased in one-buttoned black kid gloves a size too large for her—but it was not. To Elspeth it was soft, white, warm, loving—her mother's hand.

The Dragon might walk along beside her on tiptoe, trying to keep her elastic-sided boots from sacrilegious squeaking, in her prim black bonnet with its broad strings tied under her chin, and jacket with linen collar pinned invisibly inside it, but Elspeth never saw her. So far as she was concerned the Dragon might have been left outside the gates altogether. It was a radiantly youthful figure which glided by her side, with shining copper-red curls like her own, only longer, and a soft, white, flowing robe the same as the angel wore in one of the beautiful marble monuments.

She would seem to pause with Elspeth beside the statues, and speak to the little aching, childish heart something like this:

"My child, my own only little child, for whom I gave my life, I want you to grow up brave and noble like those heroes—those men who died, or lived, for their faith. It is harder sometimes to live than to die."

She would move on then slowly, till they came to the place where they thought she slept herself.

Then the Dragon would take a trowel out of the canvas hand-bag she carried, and reverently dig the flower-border round, while the child with the mother-angel stood watching her hand in hand.

The Dragon's eyes were holden so that she could not see, but she was always very gentle on those occasions. Not even, when forgetting sometimes where she was, Elspeth skipped over an intervening grave—for her mother was young and let her do it—would her voice rise higher than a shocked "Oh! Think shame!"

Then Elspeth would "think shame" indeed, and with crimson cheeks and tearful eyes would hang her head low. But it always seemed to her as if her mother smiled at her, and even laughed a little in a happy girlish way. For, after all, there was nobody underneath those graves. They were all so very wide awake—elsewhere.

Then, still holding her mother's hand, they went over the paths and round the graves till they came to Freddy's. The Dragon would leave Elspeth there, where she knew she liked to play quietly, and go farther on by herself into the older part of the cemetery where some of her own people slept. There she often met friends, and they sat and gossiped together on the flat tombstones, keeping a watchful eye on Elspeth at the same time.

Freddy's little garden-bed always seemed to lie in a mist of blue. Whether they had been the colour of his eyes, or his favourite flower, I do not know, but his little grave seemed always blue with forget-me-nots. A tiny white monument rose at the head, so small it was little more than a tablet. On it was inscribed in gold letters the words:—

"LITTLE FREDDY
Aged four."

"'Alas, Master, for it was borrowed.'"

That quotation was a great mystery to Elspeth. She knew, of course, the story of the prophet and the borrowed axe. She knew Freddy's father and mother, and brothers and sisters, very well indeed. She knew also a little

vacant high chair, where she sometimes sat when she went to his home to tea. She had seen his mother's eyes full of tears as she looked at her sitting in it, for she had been the very same age as Freddy, and their mothers had been close friends. But any thought of the beautiful sentiment evinced in that text was far from her. To her it was literally an axe, a borrowed axe at that, and what was a little boy like Freddy doing with it?

Once, when she was sitting in the high chair, she ventured to ask his mother;

"Did your little Freddy cut himself with an axe?"

But the mother looked so unmistakably distressed, and answered in such a broken voice; "No, darling, God took him," that she could ask no more.

Another time she asked the Dragon, changing the form of the question and giving no names.

"Why did they let a little wee boy have an axe?"

And the Dragon answered;

"Axe? They never do let little wee boys have axes, nor little girls either. What do they want with axes, I would like to know!"

So the mystery remained. That was the beginning of Elspeth's talking to a phantom Freddy. She sat down by the tiny grave, with its white railings, and its mist of blue forget-me-nots, and in a low tone she asked questions.

"Why did they give you an axe, Freddy?"

"Why was it borrowed? Hadn't your father got one of his own?"

"Did you steal the axe and kill yourself with it?"

"Were you beheaded like Queen Mary?"

And then it seemed one day as if Freddy came himself and answered; "I don't know anything about axes, and I don't know why you are always asking me. But I like forget-me-nots, and I want to play with you, and if you'll just run round that grave I'll try and catch you."

So after that he seemed to play with her every Saturday—at least she thought so. And her angel-mother sat on a grave and watched them running about. She would rest her elbow on her knee (as the angel did on the monument), and her wide white sleeve would fall back and show her softly rounded arm, and the afternoon sun, travelling in glory towards the west, would

light upon her auburn curls till they shone like burnished copper.

(They always called her mother's hair "auburn" and Elspeth's unvarnished "red," although they were exactly the same shade, an injustice which she never could fathom.)

The hawk-like eye of the Dragon would fix Elspeth now and again, but to her blinded senses she was still sitting silently by the white railings and she saw none of those phantom gambols. One day Elspeth so far forgot herself as to laugh out loud, for she thought she had caught Freddy at the foot of John Knox's statue, and it seemed as if even the grave Reformer's stern face had relaxed its expression. But the Dragon turned hastily round with a very withering one on hers.

Elspeth could have told Freddy's mother. She was so gentle and kind, and had so sweet and motherly an air, that she would like to have slipped her hand into hers and said;

"Do you know I play with your Freddy when I go to the cemetery on Saturday afternoons? He wants me to tell you that the forget-me-nots grow by the river where he lives. They are very

big ones, and there are whole fields of them up to his knees. But he knows nothing at all about axes, and neither do I. That isn't a nice text on his grave."

But perhaps even Freddy's gentle mother would have said she was dreaming. So blind are grown-ups.

Then after the Dragon and her friends had gossiped a long while, they would saunter slowly towards her and say it was time to go home. They were mostly married friends who met the Dragon up there, sometimes with a baby or two. But when she took Elspeth's hand to lead her home, the child would invariably say she had not been yet to see Jane, and with her cemetery-acquired amiability the Dragon would reply;

"Very well, then, go and see Jane's grave, and we will wait for you here, or go slowly on."

The friend of the day would probably inquire, "Whatna, Jane?" and the tones of the voices would be lowered instantly.

Elspeth did not want to hear what they said, for they all spoke about Jane in the same tone of shocked awe, and to her Jane's memory was sacred. So she walked on by herself to where Jane's lonely grave was.

It was right in an angle of an unfinished wall all by itself. A rubbish-heap was on one side of it, dandelions and dock-leaves and other rank weeds grew in luxuriance around it. It was just a low mound, gradually flattening itself to the level of the rubbish on each side of it, as if it did not matter where "Jane" was put. No mark of any kind had been put up on it, but Elspeth could have singled out that spot even if they had built the wall on the top of it. No one passed that way except workmen with barrows, so no one heard what she said when she bent down low, and laid her hand lovingly on the dockens beside that deserted grave.

"Dear Jane," she whispered softly, "I love you, and I shall never forget you. When I am a woman you shall have lilies-of-the-valley on your grave, and if—if—you have really gone to that—bad place—that they say, I will ask my mother if she will go and see you sometimes. Good-bye, *dear Jane.*"

Then she would walk away again, and go home, lagging as far as possible behind the Dragon and her friends, whom the mere mention of the name of Jane had sent off on a trail of gossip sufficient to last them all the afternoon.

When they left the cemetery gates behind Elspeth always looked back before they turned the corner, and waved her hand in farewell. And it was a very usual thing to overhear the remark:

“Wha’s she wavin’ to? What a queer bairn.”

“Oh, just some of her fancies,” the Dragon would answer.

But it was no fancy to Elspeth. For her mother was at the gate waving to her, with the light shining on her beautiful hair and the smile in her eyes. And surely it would have hurt her if her child had not waved back.

CHAPTER V

LADIES OF THE KITCHEN

ELSPETH liked them best by far. The ladies of the nursery were always autocratic, and thought their children so much superior, and the babies squalled so loudly. The noise of a well-filled nursery was distracting to the nervous, solitary child.

The ladies of the drawing-room were sometimes very sweet, like Freddy's mother, but they were apt to be personal and make one feel sadly old-fashioned and self-conscious.

"Poor little lamb," one would say, "why *does* Janet dress her like that?"

And another would say, kindly enough:

"My dear child, you really must not use such old-fashioned words. You said this was a 'little conceit.' There isn't such a thing as a 'little conceit.' Unless it is yourself," she might add in an undertone.

One house in particular, the home of a large family, was quite spoilt for her because she always had to spend the whole day there, and din-

ner was made a perfect misery over the little matter of the holding of a spoon.

"My dear little girl, can't you hold that spoon properly yet? I have told you so many times. I really must speak to Janet about it. She is getting you into quite servants' ways, and it would so vex your mother, dear. *Ladies* never hold their spoons like that."

They always said "dear" when they were unusually personal, like a sweet after a grey powder. Even the joys of the happy nursery in that house, where a pair of plump, beautiful twins, who seldom cried, disported themselves together every evening in a long coffin-shaped bath, hardly consoled her for the miseries endured at that lady's dinner-table.

Elspeth's father, a young and rising solicitor, was hard at work in his office all day. Being withal of a very genial and social nature, with a most lovable and attractive disposition and handsome presence, also—an important matter, no doubt—a distinctly eligible man, was much sought after in the provincial society of the town, and was seldom at home in the evenings. No doubt the word "home" only spelt the desolation of emptiness for him.

The Dragon also sought occasionally to relieve the tedium of the long winter evenings by visiting her friends, taking her charge with her, and receiving visits from them in return.

The kitchen ladies were mostly of her own class, respectable upper servants, working housekeepers to single ladies or gentlemen. Sometimes they had servants under them, and then Elspeth and the Dragon sat in state in the housekeeper's room. But that was not much fun for the child. She had albums of faded photographs given her to look at, and if she appeared to be listening to the conversation the voices immediately dropped into stage whispers, often interspersed with spelt words—a great insult to a child, one of the incomprehensible meannesses of a certain class of grown-ups, easily seen through by transparent youthful souls.

Once Elspeth overheard the Dragon say that she did not consider she was paid high enough wages, so she promptly asked her father next morning, in the Dragon's presence, if he could not give her more. She meant it in kindness, and perhaps—just a little—to curry favour with her nurse. But anyhow the result was a sad dis-

appointment. Her father's step had hardly ceased to sound on the pavement as he walked off, laughing, to his office, when the Dragon led her solemnly down the kitchen stairs, and in the solitude of the back regions introduced her to the rod of correction. And, to imprint the incident on her childish memory still further, she was made to repeat, without a mistake, ten times in succession the formula:

"A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back."

She was sadly mixed between saddles and bridles by the time she was done, and did not know whether the text applied to her, personally, as a horse, an ass, or a fool. But perhaps she was only meant to act as a bridle round the neck of the Dragon.

After that she was branded as untrustworthy, or, to use the Dragon's own expressive word, as a "tale-pyet," and the whispering and spelling between some of her friends and herself increased in volume.

There was a mystery attached to one gentleman's house to which they used to go, and some excitement also. In that housekeeper's room they always sat with bated breath, and talked in

undertones, for fear the "master" should hear them.

The master, as was understood from snatches of whispered conversation, had in youth experienced a disappointment and had become a confirmed misogynist.

"Jilted in love," whispered the Dragon; "hates the women like poison."

All visitors to his establishment, however, male as well as female, were strictly forbidden. Elspeth and the Dragon skulked in by a side gate labelled "Servants" in the dusk, walking softly on the grass beside the path, slinking under the shadows of the trees, till they reached a side entry, where the stout and portly housekeeper, with her finger on her lip to enforce silence, always admitted them with her own fair hand.

The master was an old man now, but glimpses of him seen through the chinks of closed Venetian blinds were not reassuring. With a black silk skull-cap on his head, and his hands clasped firmly behind his back, he paced backwards and forwards on a paved path laid down for him on the lawn so that he could not get his feet damp, under the light of the moon. He was said to write books on learned and abstruse subjects, and he

could often be heard muttering their contents to himself. Altogether, he was uncanny, and Elspeth sat very still on a little stool behind the door in that housekeeper's room, listening in dread for a shuffling step coming along the passage.

There were compensations, however, in the way of kittens, and she was sitting one evening with four very new blind ones tucked beneath a little tartan shawl pinned round her (for there were draughts behind the door), when, after having had many false alarms, she really did hear the shuffling step close by. The hostess and the Dragon had their heads close together talking across a small table, when the door opened suddenly, and there stood the master!

He was not so fearsome close at hand. His eyes were small, and black, and twinkling under his beetling brows, but they were mild and even kind in expression. The servants both stood up hastily in evident fear and trembling, however. Elspeth also stood up, dropping kittens in every direction, and made a little old-fashioned curtsy, as the Dragon had taught her to do to her superiors.

"Who is this?" said the master, and his tones were very stern.

The housekeeper hurriedly explained.

"Oh, sir, this is Mr. Hugh Arnot's Janet, and his little girl. You know Mr. Hugh Arnot, sir, and young Mrs. Hugh, you remember."

The master looked at the child with a kindly smile.

"I remember," he said gently. "So this is the motherless babe. Come with me, my dear. I have apples in my study, and dates," and he held out his hand.

Janet hurriedly dashed forward to unpin the tartan shawl and give a hasty stroke to the child's untidy head. But the master ignored her. She had broken his rules. So had Elspeth, but he evidently did not blame her.

There was nothing terrible about the master in his study. He was gentleness itself. His kindly eyes beamed as he planted her on a hassock by the fire, and peeled an apple for her with a dainty silver knife and fork. He asked her many questions about her father and grandfather, and the shyness fell away from her lonely little soul like a mask. Then he asked a direct personal question.

"And is your nurse kind to you?" he asked, and with quick eye noticed the hesitation in the

affirmative reply. When at last the apples and dates were finished he told her it was time to go home, and, as she rose demurely, he rested his wrinkled hand a moment on her curls and gave her his benediction.

“May the Lord bless you and keep you, little one. Remember, the God of the fatherless is also the God of the motherless.”

And the child went away feeling solemnised, as if she had been at church. The master had been so much nicer than the minister, who always asked her questions out of the Catechism with some sternness, and that, together with the Dragon’s angry eye fixed on her, made her completely forget the answers, although she knew them quite well. She never saw the master nor his housekeeper again, for he died soon after.

But of all the ladies of the kitchen, Jane Kidd was the flower, a perfect Princess Royal amongst housekeepers. She lived in the large house which faced down the square where Elspeth lived. It was a bright, sunny, square-built house and had echoed to the sound of merry young voices in its day. Now it was silent, and stood pathetically in its loneliness and detachedness. The sons of the house had all been military. Now it might

almost have been called a relic of the Crimea and the Indian Mutiny. There were many such desolated homes in Scotland in those days.

Old Major Kidd walked in and out for many a day afterwards, his military stride unchanged—the cavalry stride, with feet well apart to keep the spurs which were no longer there from entanglement—but with bent shoulders, and broken heart, after the awful news came from India.

Miss Margaret, his only surviving child, lay always in a quiet back bedroom, overlooking the garden, after the fall of Sebastopol, paralysed through shock, with all her fair hopes shattered in her gentle breast. When the guns were firing, and bonfires were blazing all over the country over the news of victory, at the conclusion of the Crimean War, Miss Margaret had been sobbing her heart out in the kitchen, with her head resting on her faithful servant's shoulder.

But bad as the Russian news was it had been easier to bear than the other. Of the Indian massacre, father and daughter never spoke. It was known throughout the town that the gallant Captain, the Major's last, and youngest, son had been blown from native guns, and the angel over

the well of Cawnpore watches to this day over his young wife and her little ones.

The aged Major gradually grew frailer. His military stride became more shuffling. He dragged his feet instead of a sword, and his face remained grim and set until the day when he fell calmly asleep in his easy-chair, never to wake on earth again.

It was in the years after his death that Elspeth and the Dragon visited Jane in the kitchen. The family then consisted only of the two solitary women, a one-legged soldier, Jeremiah Kidd (all were called by the name of the lady of the house in Elspeth's mind) who looked after the garden and could tell endless tales of the Crimean War and of Scutari, where he had been nursed back to life by the Lady of the Lamp and her devoted band of Sisters. It was known that he had been Captain Moore's (Miss Margaret's lover's) body-servant, and that it was he who had brought home that gallant officer's sword, which hung always on the wall opposite her bed.

There was also Garibaldi Kidd, a huge, ferocious-looking mastiff, who lived in a kennel outside and protected the family. It was a military household altogether.

Jane was a plump, sunny-faced, brown-eyed woman in her prime. She had high spirits and was no respecter of persons, for she slapped the Dragon heartily on the shoulder, and danced round her with a merry "Slap, bang! Here we are again," for a greeting, when she saw her two prim visitors demurely coming round to the back entrance on alternate Wednesday evenings, and ran out to meet them. The Dragon, mind you! But even she laughed and said, "Ye daft lassie," and looked as if she rather enjoyed it. Everybody knew Jane's merry, happy ways.

The next performance was to produce samples of her skill from the oven for their refreshment. Such dainty turn-overs, with the apples simmering and hissing in their own juice, asking to be eaten! Such delicate little plum cakes! Such triumphs of culinary art in the way of puff-pastry heroes, with military coats and buttons, and currant eyes, and strips of lemon-peel for swords! To be nibbled—nay, mutilated—daintily, cannibal fashion.

After the favoured visitors' appetites had thus been gently tickled, and the Dragon had disbursed herself of the most important items of her fortnightly budget of news, the fun began.

"You just spoil her," said the Dragon on every occasion. "She can play by herself quite well. She has to play at home. I never play with her. Give her your work-basket, and she'll sit still and make up stories with the bobbins and be quite happy."

But Jane's answer was always the same.

"No," she said, with decision, "poor bairn. While she's here in my kitchen she shall have her fun. Miss Margaret likes to hear her laugh."

So then the fun began, and Jane's versatile genius shone. I have already said she was a Princess Royal amongst kitchen ladies. Voices rose from different parts of the basement, mysterious, shrill, sibilant, gruff, for Jane was a born ventriloquist of no mean order. The deep growling voice of Angus McNab, the big, fat town bellman, called down the chimney in imperative tones.

"I want that little girl you've got there with you. She's good for eating, *she* is, with those cheeks like ripe apples, and those rosy lips."

Then there were loud shrieks, and Jane's indignant voice replying:

"Indeed, then, and you won't have her."

And they raced away together, tumbling over

each other in their haste to escape from the greedy bell-man.

Willie Windy whistled in his blustery fashion through the keyhole of the back door.

"Where's my little wifie? the little girl with the auburn curls?" (Ah, Jane, Jane! You knew the weakness and pandered to juvenile vanity.) "I want to carry her off to the back of the North Wind. He's my brother. It is cold there without a wife."

"You are the North Wind yourself, aren't you?" Jane would question.

And the Wind would whistle angrily.

"Who says I am the North Wind? How dare you? I'm not. I blow from the south, where the oranges——"

"You! Oranges!" Jane would retort, "with the snow coming slithering through the keyhole while you speak. You shall *not* have my wee lassie for a wife."

Then the Wind would go "Whew——" along the stone passages, and become so boisterous that once or twice Miss Margaret's bell rang to know if there was a hurricane downstairs.

Sometimes she would send down for the Dragon and Elspeth to go and see her, and then

the child would sit very still on the bed watching the bright-faced lady who was bed-ridden with great interest, but returning as soon as possible to the entertainment below stairs.

Jane could dance the Highland Fling well. Kilting up her skirts would do the sword-dance with great neatness and dexterity, and her twinkling, well-shod feet would jink in and out between the broomsticks, which took the place of swords, like the best Highlander of them all. So well would she dance, leaving no little turn, or swirl of skirt, undone, that even the grave Dragon's expression would relax, and, forgetting the Covenanters and her ancestors, she would clap her hands at sight of the dances of her native land so well done, and remark dryly:

"You would take the prize for dancing at the Highland Games, Jean. You just need a kilt."

Then there were scones and fresh butter for supper, and milk with thick cream on the top of it, and the visitors would depart well-pleased with their evening's entertainment. Even the Dragon was amiable for a day or two afterwards.

It was on the morning of one of those red-letter alternate Wednesdays (the others were black, being reserved for the administration of

castor oil and whippings) that Auntie Rosie, the charwoman, came running, at full speed down the square for the Dragon. And she, without stopping to take off her morning-cap, ran off with her without a single word of explanation, leaving Elspeth with her face pressed against the dining-room window-pane vainly trying to see what was the matter.

It was a very quiet square in the residential part of the town, inhabited chiefly by professional men, and there was no traffic to speak of. Elspeth waited patiently by the window. The minutes passed into the half-hour, which struck, then the hour, and still no Dragon.

Then a quick firm step came round the corner. There was a cry of delight, and the lonely child was half-way down the front steps, and in her father's arms, in less time than it takes to write it. Breathlessly she told him of Janet's sudden and long disappearance, the words tumbling over each other in her haste. Then her father said;

"Well, I'm going out into the country at twelve o'clock. The gig is coming for me. I want some sandwiches to take with me, so we'll have to make them ourselves as best we can. Something has happened up the square, evidently. Come

along down to the pantry with me and see if you can help."

Together they rummaged in the pantry, and clumsily constructed sandwiches were wrapped in paper before the gig drove up to the door. At the same moment the Dragon returned. Her eyes were red with weeping.

"Oh, sir, I am very sorry," she said, "for running off like that, but Jane found Miss Margaret dead in her bed this morning and they sent down for me. No one can do anything with Jane, she is like a mad creature, and they are afraid she'll——"

Here the rest of the conversation was continued in an undertone.

"Well," said Elspeth's father aloud at last. "I'll take the child with me, and you can go up and stay with Jane to-day. I shall not be home till the evening. Run, dearie, and get on your coat and hat—quickly, for I am late."

So perched up beside her father in the high gig, muffled up in her mother's furs, Elspeth drove off with her father in style, and they were soon bowling along the fast-bound roads into the country.

From that day Jane disappeared.

The shrouded house at the top of the square bore the usual evidences of bereavement, and in due time Miss Margaret's funeral wended its way to the cemetery, amidst every token of respect and sorrow on the part of her neighbours and friends.

But of Jane, with the merry heart and the snod, dancing feet, there was never more any sign. She had vanished out of the life of the square as completely as if she had never been.

CHAPTER VI

THE SECRET OF THE WATERS

AUNTIE ROSIE was a useful and homely personage, who went out to her daily labour of washing and charing in the early morning, and returned in the evening to her humble little home on the banks of the river. Past the windows of her cottage the great river rushed on its way to the sea, swirling, black, deep, gaining in ever-increasing velocity as it narrowed to force itself under the wide arches of the railway-bridge, which spanned it here. It was not the smoothly flowing silver stream that it was a mile or two higher up. Since then it had gathered three tributaries on its broad bosom, and together they were all racing to the sea. Down at Auntie Rosie's the river was fascinating by reason of being terrible, especially to Elspeth, on those rare visits to the cottage which she paid when the Dragon wished to engage its occupant for extra work. She could have stood for hours, had she been permitted, watching the black, angry, seething vol-

umes of water, the swirling eddies, and the creamy froth round the arches of the bridge. But the Dragon generally pounced on her and dragged her away.

"It will draw you in," said the Dragon. That is what fascinating things do, it seems.

Auntie Rosie herself was a fat, jolly-looking woman given to much talk and laughter. Her laugh was fat and gurgling. Folds of superfluous flesh shook in all directions with suppressed merriment whenever she laughed. Her life was sad, but to look at her you would have thought this game of daily washing and charring, with a lazy, drunken husband who drank all her earnings, was the best joke going. She was rather deaf, and, like most deaf people, was given to talking in a very loud voice. She never needed to wait for an answer, for if one were not forthcoming she immediately supplied the deficiency herself. The strange thing about her was that she seemed to be everybody's aunt. Indeed it was probable she was Elspeth's as well as the rest, for when she went to the house in the square every fortnight she always greeted the child thus:

"And how is the little Missy to-day?"

And Elspeth replied gravely, as she had been taught;

"I am quite well, I thank you, Auntie Rosie."

And no one had ever checked her for doing so.

It was from Auntie Rosie's conversation, addressed to the Dragon, that Elspeth gathered her first clue to the mystery of Jane's disappearance.

It was on the Tuesday following Miss Margaret's death. Auntie Rosie was established in the little wash-house in the yard at the back of Elspeth's home, in an atmosphere of steam and soap-suds, from whence her rubicund countenance, rising like the full moon through a mist, beamed on all the trades people who came to the back door, while at the same time she carried on a desultory conversation with the Dragon during her intermittent visits to the kitchen.

The Dragon had asked some question, which Elspeth, hovering about the back, did not hear, but she heard the answer.

"No," Auntie Rosie replied, "no a sign o't, and been in the watter since last Thursday. It was me that saw the shawl and bunnet, ye ken, lyin' by the side o' the watter.

" 'Rin, rin,' sez I tae Tam, 'there's somebody fa'in in.'

THE SECRET OF THE WATERS 73

“ ‘I’ll rin nane,’ sez Tam; ‘ye’re daft, ye can gang yersel’. I’m no’ gaun tae be mixed up wi’ the poliss.’

“So I gaed mysel’, and there was the fine new black m’urnin’ shawl and bunnet, but no’ a buddy was tae be seen. Hech! little did I think it was Jean. Bonnie Jeanie, we aye ca’ed her. My! but she could dance. I saw the Hielanders dancin’ aince at the Hieland Games, but they didna dance ony better than Jean—no near sae weel, I’m thinkin’.”

And then the Dragon’s eyes fell on Elspeth, listening with round eyes and mouth wide open, and she was told to run away and play directly. But she had heard, and when they went up to the cemetery on the following Saturday, she asked the Dragon point-blank;

“Is Jane dead?” and was answered, “Yes,” with a sharp snap of the lips.

Elspeth’s throat was parched and her voice choking, as she whispered her next request.

“I want to see her grave, please.”

But the Dragon replied more sharply still:

“She has no grave. She is not buried.”

No grave! Not buried! What did that mean? She dared not ask any more, but in se-

cret she wept bitterly for Jane, her true friend, the gay Princess of the Dance.

As it was Auntie Rosie who supplied the first clue to Jane's disappearance, so some weeks later it was she who supplemented it.

There was mystery in the air that morning. Elspeth was sent upstairs to play, and told to shut the door at the top of the landing, as usual when Auntie Rosie was there, for, as I have said, she was deaf and her voice penetrated far.

And here let me digress for a moment to say that to play alone was no hardship to Elspeth, and the meaning of the word "loneliness," as we understand it, she did not know, at least so far as play was concerned. With the whole house to wander over and fresh fields for imagination in every room, she needed no companionship, even dolls were often quite superfluous. So, when she was shut out from the kitchen and its denizens, she was wont to wander into the drawing-room and people it with creations of her own.

It was a large pleasant room with three windows in it, and the Dragon kept it spotlessly neat. With the sentiment of her race she left everything untouched, as it had been during the young wife's short reign in her kingdom. Music

THE SECRET OF THE WATERS 75

still lay piled on the piano, wedding-presents—ornaments and paintings for the most part—decorated the room. By the large chintz-covered sofa stood a rosewood work-table, just as its owner had left it that night when she left the room never to return.

It was the child's custom to sit down on the sofa and receive imaginary visitors. After some conventional conversation with them to begin with, she would open the work-table, and, taking out the piece of work left lying within it, would put on the small gold thimble and pretend to sew. It was an exquisite piece of needlework—the unfinished top of a little baby's frock—and the needle and cotton were still left in it. As she sewed—or rather, pretended to—she took her visitors into her confidence.

"Yes," she would say, "this is for my own little baby who is coming to me soon. I have finished the christening robe and the plainer frocks, this is only for second best."

"How do I know I have a little baby coming to me? Why, the angels whispered it to me. Do you know how wee babies are made? I do. God just takes a pinch of dust and blows on it, and it comes down to earth like that. They are

just made of dust and God's breath. It is not true that they are found in cabbages. I have looked for them often in the Laird's garden and there were none there. There were only caterpillars, and they turn into butterflies, so they couldn't be babies.

"No, I don't want a little boy. I want a little girl that I can teach to sew little wee stitches like these. And I want her to have auburn curls, and they may be carrotty if they like, but never, *never* shall people *dare* to call them red while I am there. I'll stick up for her, poor wee thing.

"Yes, perhaps the little baby *may* come to-night. I don't know when 'zactly, the angels didn't say, they like to surprise people. But I have got the basket all ready for it—such a funny one. Why do babies need such funny baskets, I wonder? It is in the next room. Would you like to come and see it?"

Then they would walk, the phantom-guests and the solitary child, into the spare-room. A sad and shrouded room, with the mystery of life bestowed, and life taken away, hanging about it always. And in the wardrobe, she would show these invisible ones the baby's basket with its soft muslin coverings, carefully washed and ironed by

the methodical Dragon every year. And she would open the bottom drawer.

Ah, that bottom drawer!

There lay, under folds of silk paper, a girlish wedding-gown of white silk, a veil of tulle, a chaplet of orange-blossoms, a dainty lace handkerchief, and a pair of satin shoes, hardly pressed by the slim feet on that one time of bridal wearing. While beside them all lay the baby's christening robe—that dearly bought little baby—a vision of purity and exquisite embroidery.

I do not think any morbid feelings ever came over Elspeth as she gazed in that drawer, as she often did, smoothing the silken frock with her fingers, replacing the silk paper again, and closing it very softly, as the Dragon closed the gates in the cemetery. Her mother's spirit was always so very near her, hovering, watching, a guardian angel over her little child.

Very beautifully and touchingly, out of his own great love for his mother, does Mr. Barrie picture the spirit of the mother, dying at the birth of her child, coming in the night to look in the drawers at her little one's under-garments to see if it had warm enough clothing to wear.

But Elspeth's mother did much more for her

than that. She lived ever beside her. The whole house seemed full of her. Something of hers was still lying in every room, her music, her work, her paintings, as if she had only gone out of sight for a very little while into some other room, and had left the door unlatched for her loved ones to follow.

When Elspeth was naughty and pranced in tempers over the Dragon's whippings, the sight of a patch of blue sky would quiet her directly. They were her mother's eyes (which had been blue) looking down at her naughty little girl, and heart-broken sobs and tears would follow. The terror of her childhood was that when she reached Heaven she would be found to be one of those foolish virgins who had no oil in their lamps, and that the gates would be shut in her face and the terrible words "Too late, too late," be pronounced against her for her childish misdeeds.

When she had gently closed the bottom drawer Elspeth would return again to the drawing-room, and, as she had been told her mother had done on the last evening she had spent in that room, offer to sing to her visitors.

"Shall it be 'The Blue Bells of Scotland'?" she

would ask politely, and on apparently receiving an answer in the affirmative she would sing, sitting at the piano.

The Dragon might, at the sound of the singing wafted below-stairs, come up with a sharp material question.

"Have you got a newspaper on the piano now not to mark the polish with your fingers?"

Yes, there would be a newspaper carefully spread over the closed piano, for it was always kept locked. The piano was a sacred instrument. Elspeth would not be likely to forget to protect it with a newspaper. The Dragon would then go away downstairs again and leave the child to her songs, and a bird-like little treble voice would warble through the silent house, singing about blue-bells or a hundred pipers.

But the games were not always those of sentiment and imagination. Often they were very noisy, even martial in type, as when volleys of musketry were fired (a thick mahogany ruler rattling down the bannisters), or when, in the box-room, a mask and foil belonging to her father did good execution against the unseen foes.

On the day when Elspeth heard the solution of the mystery of Jane's disappearance, she was sit-

ting in her father's dressing-room—in his bath, to be exact. The handle of the shower was in her hand, the chintz curtains lined with waterproof were closely drawn around her. It was a realistic performance, which had already on two separate occasions gone too far, for by accident she had pulled the shower down and had been drenched from head to foot, in her clothes, the cold water and the Dragon's wrath deluging her simultaneously. But it was all the more fascinating on that account. She was sitting now in the empty bath, imagining the shock and shudder of the cold water coming down on her head, when she was arrested by the sound of Auntie Rosie's loud voice, floating through the open window from the yard at the back, in conversation with the Dragon in the kitchen.

"The corp' was an awfu' sicht," shouted Auntie Rosie cheerfully, her tones somewhat muffled by the corner of a sheet, which she held in her strong teeth, while she dexterously swished it round her tub preparatory to wringing it. "Losh! if I was gaun tae tak' my life I wadna droon mysel'. A buddy looks awfu'."

Auntie Rosie laughed her fat laugh. "Hech—hech—hech!" and every fold and crease of su-

perfluous flesh crinkled with laughter. Not that she was unfeeling. It was only her way of expressing her emotion. Where tears take one, laughter takes another.

"What wonder, after a month?" said the Dragon quietly, from the kitchen.

"Ay, what wonder? They wad niver hae got her if she hadna stuck on ane o' the piers o' the auld brig. She had tied muckle stanes roond her gown tae keep hersel' doun. They saw her at low watter. The river's extra dry this week. They say there's a neap tide, though what the watter has to dae wi' neeps at this time o' the year I dinna ken. They're a' howkit up in the gairdens lang syne."

The Dragon replied to this in a murmur quite inaudible to the listener upstairs, but Auntie Rosie's response was loud and cheerful.

"Oh, they wad niver hae kent it was Jean. She wasna like a human buddy ava', if it hadna been for the bit brooch at her neck. Ye mind? It had Miss Marget's hair ae side and her photograph the ither."

Elsbeth got out of the bath, white and trembling in every limb. Never had the proverb anent "little pitchers" been better illustrated.

The wonder was she did not pull the shower down in her terror and agitation. But before she ran away to hide under the drawing-room sofa—her usual place of retreat in times of great tragedy—she could not help hearing the rest, as she stood for a moment transfixed with horror.

“Ay, they’re buryin’ her the day. Takin’ her up back streets no’ tae hae a croud aifter her. She was awfu’ weel likit was Jean. I dinna ken whaur they’ll pit her. I didna hear. They canna pit her in the kirkyaird amang ither dacent fowk, and they canna hae ony prayers ower her.”

No prayers! No proper grave in the churchyard! Jane, her Jane of the merry heart, could have no prayers said over her, and was not good enough to lie beside the rest of the departed, who had shaken off their burden of mortality in the usual fashion!

Elsbeth’s blood boiled with indignation. It boils still when she thinks of it.

Ah, it is well that the gates of Heaven are wide, for the ways of men are often very narrow. And for that poor unhinged mind, and heart broken with the strength of its great love and devotion to an earthly mistress, there may have been

THE SECRET OF THE WATERS 83

tender mercy shown even at the threshold of that other life. Who knows?

Elspeth, child as she was, could not have put her indignant feelings into words if she had tried. But it was not long till, by dint of much worrying of the Dragon in the cemetery (after seeing her in deep and solemn converse with the grave-digger), she discovered the nameless mound by the rubbish heap and prayed her defiant, heterodox prayers beside it.

CHAPTER VII

A DAY OF SOLEMN THINGS

A SABBATH peace lies over my garden. The very bees seem to hum more softly in its stillness.

In the distance I hear the musical chimes of the Church of St. Bertram's playing a hymn-tune. The tinkling bell of St. Cuthbert's floats down from the promontory at the end of the cliffs. The invitation of St. Mary's, Star-of-the-Sea, rings far out over the furled sails of the fishing smacks and yachts, snugly tucked away for their day's rest in the harbour. It is a day of rest and solemn things.

The call to worship here in the south is soft, inviting, even caressing. Things were different in that old grey town where Elspeth lived in the days of her childhood. The loud "cling, clang," of the bell of the Doctor of Thunders' church was peremptory, depressing, commanding. You disobeyed that sound at your peril. Peril of the Doctor's pulpit denunciations, peril of the soul in the world to come.

A DAY OF SOLEMN THINGS 85

But to Elspeth herself the Sabbaths began softly too, in those days. In a feathery corner of her father's big bed, shrouded by soft curtains of delicate grey and green, cuddled up warm and close in his loving arms, she and her father had been exchanging confidences since quite early in the morning, and talking and laughing over the doings of the week.

She was conveyed thither on Saturday nights, fresh from the bath and the Dragon's scrubbing, delicately perfumed with wholesome Brown Windsor, with the tangles of her still only half-dry curls neatly encased in a net of white tape, which stayed on exactly five minutes by the clock and had to be hunted for at the foot of the bed in the morning. She had gone to sleep early by the cheerful flicker of her father's bedroom fire, or the twinkle of innumerable stars shining in at his window, to wake and find him beside her. For try as hard as she could she never managed to keep awake till he came. It was the one weekly treat of those two lonely ones, the one and only opportunity they had of learning to know each other better, and so of getting a little more closely to the heart of things.

There is something infinitely pathetic in the

efforts of a widowed man to take the part of both parents to a little child. A widowed mother's task is hard indeed, God knows! but the widower's, to my mind, is harder still. For a true woman has a sense of intuition into a child's mind which a man does not possess. He can only put forth clumsy efforts where a woman has her natural instincts to guide her. And especially hard must it be for him when the child is a girl. Her nature is an unknown world to a man with no wife to guide him through its intricate mazes. The enigma and mystery of womanhood is there, the woman's soul in embryo, and who can understand it? The depths of a woman's soul who can fathom? And as the twig is bent so is the tree inclined.

In the case of Elspeth's father, who had no womankind whatever belonging to him, and whose young wife had only been with him one short year, it was unusually hard. His endeavours to draw out this woman-child of his, to try and discover what lay underneath that apparently transparent, dimpled, pink-and-white little piece of humanity, were very tender, but a little awkward. She was so new and strange to him. His

heart—a loving and sympathetic heart—ached often for some help in the matter.

She had, naturally, no such feelings. If she woke first in the morning she promptly roused him by kissing him. First on the smooth patch of cheek which lay above his dark moustache. Next on his nose, and then on the dimple in the middle of his smoothly shaven chin. If these blandishments failed, she sat on his chest and rode a violent gallop on it. And that never failed to wake him and make him call out;

“Come, come, now. You little monkey!”

In her earliest days the Sunday morning’s companionship had consisted in Elspeth’s climbing up the Ben Nevis of his knees, raised up in a high heap under the bedclothes, and riding-a-cock-horse on the top of them, then falling off in a tumbled mass, this performance being many times repeated. The laughter and shrieks of the pair would reach down to the kitchen, where the Dragon, engaged in frying sausages for her own breakfast, would stop and shake her head in strong disapproval.

“To think of them! On the Sabbath too! He ought to think shame,” she would say. And, with an extra shake of the frying pan to prevent

the sausages from burning, she would repeat in solemn tones her morning orisons:—

“Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it *holy*.”

But perhaps the merry laughter of a happy babe and her tender, widowed father was no more displeasing to the Author and Framers of the commandment, the loving Father of all, than the Dragon’s frying of Sabbatarian sausages.

As Elspeth grew older her pleasures were more demure. She was her father’s little companion and comforter—his sweetheart, as he often told her—and she sat bolt upright in the crook of his arm and blinked, owl-like, in wisdom and sagacity, as he told her of his doings throughout the week. Where he had been on Friday when he was away all day; with whom he had supped on Thursday night; what he had seen in the Court House; and then sometimes he would forget she was there, and continue a forensic argument with some legal opponent. He had to be drawn sharply back to attention when that happened. His talk was no doubt much beyond her. He was a clever, highly-cultured man, and the small child’s mind was wholly a puzzle to him. But they were both very happy in their

own way, as happy as was possible in the circumstances.

Elsbeth had not many confidences to impart to him in return. Her dolls' escapades would hardly interest him. Her life was dull and monotonous outwardly, and inwardly was full of highly-coloured imaginings of which she was not even quite sure he would approve. Perhaps if she had tried she would have found more sympathy and understanding from him than she expected in that direction. But that she did not know. So she looked wise and listened to him, telling him only of prim walks with the Dragon, of an occasional tea-party, or a visit to the Park to see a Review.

He invented a mysterious language code for their private use. It was somewhat confusing, each word ending in "buss," and the conclusion of a sentence being marked by "jig." It sounded weird, to the Dragon it seemed positively heathenish. There was much laughing over each other's mistakes.

They talked together on many subjects, foolish and the reverse, but on one, as if by a tacit understanding between them, they never spoke. It was ignored as if it had no existence, although

the rattle of cups and saucers in the kitchen was a constant reminder of its actuality.

That subject was the Dragon herself. For, if the truth must be told, she ruled the father every bit as much as she ruled the child, and he was quite as much afraid of her.

Only once had Elspeth, in a gush of infantile confidence, told him of an unjust whipping which had been given her, and he was so angry, and spoke so sternly to the Dragon, that his little daughter hardly knew him, so great was the transformation in him. He would have been surprised had he seen what happened afterwards, and how severe was the second punishment meted out to the teller of tales, and the texts which Elspeth learned in the coal-cellar that day.

"He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets. . . ."

"Whoso keepeth his mouth and tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."

It was completely effectual too, and the texts were imprinted so indelibly on her memory as to check her from ever telling her father about her punishments again.

At half-past eight the Dragon's hard knuckles

rapped sharply on the door, and her voice, always more sour on Sundays, announced;

"Your shaving water, sir. And I am ready for Elspeth."

Half an hour later the child, clothed in her Sunday silk (for the frugal Dragon was having her mother's gowns made down to her a little bit at a time) was seated by her father's side at the breakfast-table. No common porridge to be eaten to-day; only delicious ham and eggs, sausages or Findon haddocks, or other Sabbath dainties. The place at the head of the table was always significantly left vacant, and the father moved quickly between his own duties at the foot and the lady's at the head.

There was not much time for conversation. The Dragon was the veriest hustler on Sundays, and, being single-handed below-stairs, had a great rush to get her work done in time to start for church, she attending a distant one of much more severe doctrine than the Doctor of Thunders'. But the morning's hurry was soon over, and, after prayers, Elspeth and her father might have been seen walking leisurely to church together hand in hand, she trying to keep step with his long

stride, holding on proudly to a blue velvet Testament with golden clasps—the Laird's present to her.

The church they attended was a large one and very crowded. The Doctor of Thunders' was a famous man and great orator. Elspeth and her father sat in the front seat of the gallery facing him. And here Elspeth's seventh day ordeal began.

It was not the sitting still through a long service, though that was hard enough. It was not the wearisome long prayers, when the grown-ups had to stand upright listening to the Doctor's eloquent perorations to the Almighty till their legs were stiff, and they had to "change their feet" as silently as possible for fear of disturbing him. For then she was allowed to disappear under the book-board and sit on a little wooden footstool, where, I am sorry to say she played with her gloves and made up stories on her fingers, so that the time passed pleasantly and swiftly. Nor was it the singing of the Psalms, for she loved music and joined her childish treble to her father's rich, musical voice long before she could read, singing "The Lord is my Shepherd," to every tune which the percenter showed from

his little platform. But it was the sermon.

The Doctor's sermons were learned and profound. They needed the whole attention of his cultered hearers, and, naturally, rumbled over the heads of the ignorant and illiterate. They had caused him deep and profound study, and much burning of midnight oil, and as he preached without a single note he expected to be listened to in the most reverent silence. He was, moreover, a man of a highly nervous temperament and could not bear interruptions. You could have heard a pin drop during his pauses, while he looked round on his large and influential congregation. His deep voice alone must be heard in their midst. The rustle of his stiff silk gown as he pulled it closer over his shoulders, after reading his text slowly and impressively twice, was the signal for a death-like stillness throughout the whole church.

And that also was the signal for Elspeth's misery to begin. With the last word of the Doctor's text something began tickling in her throat every Sunday. It was a veritable device of the Evil One, to make her miserable and disturb everybody around her. She fought against it, she struggled, she prayed. It was no use. It

was there. Something that wriggled, and irritated, and tickled, like a little worm.

"Ahem!" coughed Elspeth softly, as soon as the sermon began, and her father looked at her gravely. With the effort to suppress it it grew worse, and, after one or two more abortive "Ahems," there was a terrific blurt which sounded like an explosion. In vain she sucked three peppermints which the Dragon gave her always in her pocket before she left home. They quieted her for the time, but three peppermints, however carefully eked out by the slowest sucking, do not last seventy-five minutes, the time-limit of the Doctor's weekly sermon. Her father took her hand and gave it a little shake, and looked at her sternly. He was cross, and the tears rushed into her eyes. He thought she was making it up, because once he had taken her out to finish it in the passage, and she got home nice and early in consequence.

"Did I hear Elspeth coughing again upstairs to-day?" asked her grandfather, as they met him coming out of church, after the service, at the main door.

"You did," responded her father gravely.

"Has she got a cold?" asked grandfather

anxiously. She was his only grandchild, the daughter of his only child, and the very apple of his eye. "Linseed tea, I have heard, is a very good thing for coughs."

"She has no cold," said her father grimly. "It is her usual Sunday cough which seizes her every Sunday morning during the sermon. It is got up expressly for the Doctor's benefit and to aggravate me, I think. You will notice she has none now."

And then her kind grandfather, too, looked sternly at her.

"The Doctor does not like coughs," said he significantly. He was an Elder and knew.

That was just it. *The Doctor did not like coughs.* He had been known to stop suddenly in the midst of his sermon, more than once, to order the cougher of coughs in peremptory tones to leave his church. On Baptismal Sundays it was quite a usual thing for him to stop suddenly in his final address to the parents to say;

"Take that child out," to the mother of an unfortunate, yelling infant. To see indignant, crimson, monthly-nurses, or pale, trembling, gentle-faced mothers retiring, covered with shame, to the vestry, carrying babes struggling

with baptismal finery, and infantile rage at the Doctor's rough "slushing" of cold water on their faces, was quite a familiar sight. Many a time had Elspeth watched them go out, her own heart standing still at the sight, and she herself lived in constant terror of seeing the Doctor fixing her father with his eagle eye and saying;

"Take *that* child out."

Visions of herself in the eyes of the decorous, well-dressed congregation stumbling—she would be certain to stumble—up the wooden steps from that terribly conspicuous front seat, haunted her dreams at nights. Hence the Sunday forenoon cough. But in those days the word "nerves" would not have been permitted. One was not supposed to possess such unruly things. For a child to have a nervous cough would have been looked upon as supremely ridiculous. Like the megrims, not to be tolerated for one moment.

During the hurried walk home after the service, and still hastier snatching of a cold collation—the Doctor having encroached on the time between the "diets" of worship, thereby curtailing the diet of the physical man by the rich food he distributed for the mind—the cough vanished as if by magic. Nor did it return in the afternoon.

For the afternoon service, shorter and calmer than its predecessor, gave weary morning listeners time to indulge in siestas. Then the Doctor himself, being old, and unequal to sustain the effort of conducting two long services, sat in the front seat downstairs next the pulpit, and listened to his assistant, a mild and short-sighted young man of serene aspect, unfolding more tranquil doctrines. The aged and the very young slumbered undisguisedly. Elspeth flattened her beaver or Leg-horn hat, according to the season of the year, against her father's encircling arms, and slept comfortably. He himself started with such suspicious alertness, at the conclusion of the sermon, that one could almost have sworn he had been sleeping too, although when Elspeth accused him of it once he only said, "Hush, hush," in shocked tones.

The walk home in the afternoon was very pleasant. There was now no hurry, and much shaking of hands and conversing with friends took place, the genial young widower being a general favourite with every one. Many kind ladies—spinsters and the reverse—would have even managed his house for him had he permitted them.

Cheerful smells of cooking assailed their olfactory nerves as he and his child entered their own home again, for the Dragon had dashed out of *her* church the moment the minister had finished his sermon, and had run home most of the way on purpose to cook for them. Half an hour later saw them seated together again, smiling and hungry, disposing of tea and hot meat patties, or steak, or other viands, what in Scottish parlance is called a "tea-dinner." The Dragon waited on them in her stiff Sabbath gown of black silk, with embroidered muslin collar fastened with a gold cameo brooch at the neck. She would pause a moment perhaps, ere she closed the door to retire, and remark;

"Mr. Morrison gave us a splendid sermon, to-day, sir."

There was always some jealousy in her mind about the famous and eloquent Doctor.

"Did he?" asked her master, in the indifferent tone of one who was hungry and preferred to get on with the business in hand. "Would you like two pieces of sugar, or three, Elspeth?"

"Two, please," said Elspeth demurely, the Dragon having fixed her with her eye.

"We had five heads and a finally," continued

the privileged housekeeper, turning the handle of the door round in her hand.

"What you would call a hydra-headed sermon," said her master, smiling genially, displaying a faultless row of white teeth under his moustache.

"Sir?" queried the Dragon in astonishment.

"I said hydra-headed. That means many-headed. Rather too many heads, don't you think?"

"Not too many for me, sir," said the Dragon severely.

"Ah!" said her master helping himself to another patty. The Dragon's cooking was good, and her pastry was light and flaky as a feather.

"I could sit all day listening to Mr. Morrison expounding the sacred Scriptures," commented she.

"Ah, well, Janet, you are fonder of long sermons than I am," said her master. "The Doctor's seventy-five minutes are just about sixty too long for me. Will you pass the mustard, please, Elspeth?"

"The Doctor!" snorted the Dragon with contempt, as she closed the door, with herself outside it, feeling herself dismissed. She slammed

the one at the top of the kitchen stairs, and descended to the lower regions to air her grievances to the widowed sister who always spent Sunday evenings with her.

"A lukewarm Christian—that's what the master is," she said. "Goes to church and says the sermon is an hour too long for him. What could he get out of a quarter of an hour's sermon like the Episcopals? A lukewarm Christian. Neither hot nor cold. And God said, 'I will——'"

Here she paused over the rude word, for she was particular in her speech, and had lived with educated and refined people always. Then she continued with emphasis:

"'I will *spue* them out of my mouth.'"

"Oh, wheesht, wheesht!" ejaculated her gentler sister in horror. "He's a gude master to you, Janet. We canna judge other folks. And that was a bad, low word you said. Our mother would never let us use that word even when we were bairns."

"It's in the Bible," snapped Janet. "And he *is* a lukewarm Christian, that's all he is. He dances and plays cards nearly every night in the week, and goes walks on Sabbath evenings, when

he might be Superintendent of the Doctor's Sabbath School. Not that it is much of a school. I would rather be a doorkeeper'—(her sister was one)—“in Mr. Morrison's Church than the leader of the choir in the Doctor's, or the Superintendent of the Sabbath School either.”

And then they fell to discussing the heads of Mr. Morrison's sermon in the tone of professional critics.

CHAPTER VIII

A LITTLE SACRAMENT

ON dull, or stormy, or wet Sunday evenings, when Elspeth and her father stayed at home to keep house, she sat on her own little chair by the sofa after tea, toiling over the learning of her Psalm, the Dragon helping her with the long words as she cleared away the tea-things. Her father was in the habit then of slipping away upstairs. Very early in Elspeth's life had she begun to listen for him going into the drawing-room overhead after tea on Sunday evenings. She knew exactly what he did there. He strode across the room first, and pulled up the Venetian blinds of all its three windows. Then he paused, with the lace curtains held back in his hand, and looked out into the square. Quiet as the square always was, it was doubly so on Sundays, when there was not even the cheerful whistle of an errand-boy, or the rattle of a milk cart, to enliven it.

Then he walked over to the mantelpiece and

pretended he was playing with the candelabra on it. You could hear the tinkling of its crystal prisms downstairs. But Elspeth knew very well he was only shamming. In reality he was looking at a pair of small, hand-painted pictures in rose-wood frames, representations of birds of Paradise standing on branches of olive, specimens of the delicate art of that womanhood which has now passed away, except in old-fashioned and out-of-the-way corners. Then he went over and looked at another pair of pictures on the opposite side of the room. These were paintings of fruit, clusters of grapes, brilliant-hued apples, and plums with the bloom on them. And then at two more, flowers this time, roses, wallflowers and forget-me-nots.

Then he took a bunch of keys out of his pocket, and, unlocking the piano, passed his white handkerchief once or twice lightly over the keys. Then he walked backwards and forwards a few times, and stopped at last before a large steel engraving of Turner's Venice. He and his bride had passed their honeymoon in Italy, and had glided—so he told Elspeth—up and down those very lagoons in gondolas. He showed her the

motion on his knee sometimes and hummed snatches of the gondoliers' songs to her.

And lastly, he opened the rose-wood work-table, and touched, as tenderly as Elspeth herself, with his big, masculine fingers, the baby's little unfinished frock. He then closed the table rather hurriedly, and began pacing up and down the room again, talking to himself. It was from him Elspeth had learnt that habit.

Meantime the Dragon and her sister started off for their Sunday School, going out at the front door, the back being locked. Lonely Elspeth stood at the dining-room window watching them go. The widow smiled kindly at her. The Dragon nodded her head a great many times, a pantomimic gesture which meant as plainly as words could say, "Sit—down—and—learn—your—Psalm—this—very—minute."

Her father, drawn to the window again by the slamming of the door, smiled under his moustache at the antics, then hastily dropped the curtain and drew back when he saw the women looking up.

Elspeth, sighing wearily, returned to her chair, and toil of Psalm-learning, and the reasons annexed to the Fourth Commandment.

"Oh, dear me," she said. "Why couldn't King David make the Psalms easier to learn?"

'Kiss ye the Son lest in his ire
Ye perish from the way.'

What is his 'ire,' and why am I to kiss him?" she questioned, but there was no one to answer. She droned over the Psalm after the manner of the unlearned, repeating it in a sing-song style like the Dragon, rocking her body backwards and forwards in a seesaw-like motion to keep time to the rhythm.

Upstairs, she heard her father come out of the drawing-room and walk into the shrouded spare-room, and close the door behind him. She had never found out what he did in that room on those quiet evenings. He never pulled up the blinds there, nor did he walk about and talk to himself. He never opened the wardrobe, nor the bottom drawer, for both of them creaked loudly and she would have recognised the sound directly. From the time he went into that gloomy room till he came out, some ten or fifteen minutes later, there was absolute silence in the house.

Once, feeling very eerie downstairs with the

darkness gathering apace, Elspeth crept up to the outside of the door and waited for him, leaning against it. She heard him then speaking softly within. His voice sounded low down, near the door, as if he might be kneeling by the bed. He was not speaking in the tone he used when he walked about talking to himself. His voice was very reverent and pleading, as if he talked to Someone Who listened. It was as the tender tone of a child asking its Father for help. And Elspeth went quietly away again and wondered if he could be praying. She never intruded after that, but always waited patiently till she heard him once more pacing up and down the long drawing-room.

She watched Leerie-light-the-lamps running first up one side of the square, and then down the other, with his ladder and his long magic wand with the gas-jet in it. How swiftly he ran up the ladder, and how quickly he vanished out of sight altogether, leaving all the lamps shimmering behind him. One just outside their own gate cast a glow on Elspeth's wistful little face. Then she slipped away upstairs to the drawing-room to her father, and said;

"Please, father, I am lonely, and it is dark

downstairs. Leerie has lit all the lamps, and I know my Psalm."

Then her father would hold out a loving hand.

"Poor little daughter. Did father forget you then? Come and walk with him up and down this long room."

So then they walked up and down together, she holding his arm and taking mighty strides with her short legs to keep in step with him. They did not talk much. The man's thoughts were far away, and I do not pretend to know what they were after that little visit to the shrouded room. But I do know Elspeth's, and I know that they were very much on the subject of *clothes*.

For although it may be very nice to walk in silk attire, and Elspeth was often vain enough to put her hands under her best lace-trimmed, muslin pinafore and smooth down her silken Sabbath frock, she had a certain sense that it was hardly appropriate wear for her. Other little girls of her own age, those *mothered* little girls that she came across in the nurseries of her parents' friends, wore cottons and muslins in summer, even on Sundays, and merinos or winceys in winter. None of them wore silk, although some

of their parents were quite rich, much richer than hers. They looked admiringly at her when she wore her best frocks to their houses to tea, and touched its shimmering surface with envious fingers. While Elspeth, with a choking sob in her throat, explained hastily;

"It is my own mother's frock made down to me."

It was an act of vandalism in her eyes. There was sacrilege in the very thought of it.

So now she imagined, as she walked beside her father, that she was dressed in simple cottons and woollens like other children, and that on this other side there walked the slender, graceful figure to whom the silk gowns had originally belonged.

There was a bonnet in the band-box in the spare-room wardrobe, a simple, girlish affair of white rice straw, trimmed with white tulle and little bunches of myrtle, with sprays of white heather tucked under the brim for good luck.

"Her going-away bonnet," the Dragon had explained when asked.

So Elspeth, in fancy, retrimmed that bonnet and put it on the head of the imaginary figure. If she herself wore a blue silk dress she took it off, figuratively speaking, and put it on her phan-

tom mother, and the bonnet she retrimmed with nodding blue-bells, or cornflowers, such as grew in the Laird's fields in autumn.

If she wore a lilac silk herself, then the bonnet had heartsease or pansies in it. And if she wore her grey, thickly-lined winter silk, then the figure wore grey, and had chinchilla furs (which had also been cut up and made down by sacrilegious fingers) round her throat, and a black velvet polka and round velvet turban on her head, such as also hung in the wardrobe.

Strange fantastic thoughts of a lonely child! Were they stranger than the father's, I wonder, far away in a brown study, occasionally speaking to himself in low, confidential tones?

The clock striking seven in the hall, and the blackness of the gathering night, brought them at last back to mundane affairs again.

"We must go down now," said the father, "or the dining-room fire will be out, and Janet will scold us both when she comes in."

The fire generally was out, or nearly so, and hand in hand they explored the kitchen cupboards for wood, and paper, and bellows. They lit it again together, Elspeth poking the wood with her fingers and her father sitting on a hassock with his

long legs crossed, bellows in hand, blowing hard to make a blaze.

When the Reverend Ebenezer Morrison, on his ministerial calls on the Dragon twice a year, after inquiring about her own spiritual state, put the question (he had a bad memory so he generally put the same question):

"And this family you serve with? Are they decided Christians like yourself?"

The Dragon would answer modestly:

"There is only my master and his little motherless girl. And I try to do my duty by the little girl, sir."

Mr. Morrison would then say suavely:

"I am sure you do, Janet. I am sure you do. But your master, what of him?"

Janet would then purse up her lips and reply, after a pause:

"My master, sir, is a member of the fashionable Dr. Z——'s church. He is a regular attendant and communicant there. But——" she would add, shaking her head slowly and sadly, "he is not a 'professor.'"

Then Mr. Morrison would say "Ah!" very gravely, and smooth his black kid gloves carefully before he shook hands with her. He said

"Ah!" again as he reached the gate. That explained the fine editions of Shakespeare, and "Don Quixote," and other ungodly books which he had seen in the book-case. But by the time he had reached the bottom of the square he had forgotten all about the little household. Such was the fine quality of his absent mind.

Not being a "professor" therefore, it never occurred to Elspeth's father that he should have been hearing his child repeat the shorter Catechism, and her badly learnt Psalm, but when the fire was blazing merrily, and the bellows had been put away, he brought down the large Bible from its place in the book-case and laid it on the table. His own views were so broad and liberal that even the little childish mind, blank as yet as a sheet of clean paper, he would leave at liberty to form its own views unbiassed, and to drink them in only from that well of religion undefiled, the Bible. He would have been rather astonished at the result sometimes, could he have read her thoughts.

Then they read a chapter together, Elspeth stumbling over the verses from a very early age. It was generally in the Psalms, and no comments were made. There is a grand roll about the

Psalms and they have not very many long words. They make a splendid reading-book for a child. It was John Wesley, I think, whose first reading-book was the Book of Proverbs. The Psalms were the child, Elspeth's. And if the stern Dragon trained her in the way she should go, according to King Solomon's rules as laid down in the Proverbs, and the silver-haired Laird opened the Book of Nature, and showed her all the Manuscripts of God unrolled for even such an infant student to read, it was her father who taught her the art of reading itself out of the Book of Psalms. And when his fine voice rolled over the "Selah," when it came at the end of the verses, Elspeth's childish treble rolled in imitation, although she had not the remotest idea what it meant.

That Bible, too, was an education in itself. It was so large and heavy that even the Dragon could not move it. It was bound in exquisite calf. It had gold edges, and on its fly-leaf was written in firm, characteristic handwriting:—

"Present to Mr and Mrs Hugh Arnot, on the auspicious occasion of their marriage, by their affectionate friend and pastor."

Here followed the Doctor's distinguished name—a name well known in Scottish ecclesiastical history and unnecessary to be put down here.

Never had the Doctor of Thunders' fine cultured taste shown itself more than in his choice of this costly and beautiful wedding-present. The large pictures in it, of which there were many, were exquisite reproductions of the works of the Great Masters. Elspeth spent hours poring over them, weeping tears of sympathy over the Massacre of the Innocents, and thrilled with awe over Daniel in the Lions' Den.

There was a Family Register between the Old and New Testaments, with a space for births, marriages, and deaths. That space was empty. All round it were artistic drawings of the seven ages of man. From the infant in the cradle to the youth bringing home his bride, and the aged couple passing, after many years, into the grave together, emerging on the other side radiant with the beauty of eternal youth. On that page Elspeth loved to linger. To family life of all sorts the solitary child's heart was drawn. But her father always turned it over hastily, as if he did not wish to see it.

"Why are there no names here?" she asked

every time, and he evaded a reply. Or else, if she were very persistent, answered;

"Because there are so few of us."

"There are you and me," argued Elspeth.

Then he would get up and walk about.

When she was tired of gazing at it and thinking how nice her full name, Elspeth Grant Arnot, would have looked there, she slipped up to him with a whispered request.

"Not to-night, darling," he replied.

"*Please*," she insisted.

"You had it only a Sunday or two ago."

"It is five Sundays," said Elspeth, pouting. "I've been at grandpa's three Sunday evenings running, and the one before that Janet had a bad cold and was at home. It is five Sundays."

But he shook his head. Then Elspeth tried blandishments, and began to pull his hand towards the sideboard. She told him that he was the dearest, darlingest father that ever a little girl had, and she loved him more than she could tell. The whole world was not big enough to hold her love, it was just bushels full.

He smiled at that, but still he shook his head.

Then Elspeth tried tears. She screwed a few far-fetched ones out into her diminutive pocket-

handkerchief, and, after watching to see the effect, gave a little smothered sob. That was very effectual. Her father could not stand tears, much less the sobs which were now following in quick succession.

He closed the big Bible quickly and moved it to the foot of the table, and walked over to the sideboard of his own accord, jingling the keys in his trousers' pocket as he went.

Elsbeth dried her tears and watched him surreptitiously behind the handkerchief.

Her father took a table-napkin out of the sideboard drawer and spread it smoothly at the top of the table. Then he unlocked the middle compartment of the sideboard, and drew out with great care the ornamental top of a wedding-cake. It stood on a silvered pedestal, and round it there ran sprays of white heather (that false emblem of good luck!), and from the sugared vase which it upheld there fell sprays of white honeysuckle, and jasmine, and orange-blossoms.

"It is a very beautiful wedding-cake, father," Elspeth said, coming over to him now, and slipping her hand in his. She knew the value of such little caresses.

"This was only the top of it," he replied. "It

had three tiers, each one bigger than the one beneath. That is how it is there is still some left."

He brought out a square biscuit-tin from the interior of the sideboard as he spoke, and tenderly lifted a large piece of wedding-cake out of it on to the lid. Then, with a silver fruit knife out of the drawer, he cut two small and delicate squares of almond-icing, sugar-icing, and rich cake, and laid them on the table-napkin.

By this time Elspeth had clambered on to his knee, and his arm went round her lovingly as they nibbled their cake together.

"I think wedding-cake is the most beautifullest thing in the whole world," said she.

"Do you?"

"Not every little girl gets the chance of eating her own mother's wedding-cake. Does she, father?"

"Not every little girl."

"It is like taking the sacrament, isn't it, father?" asked Elspeth, who had once watched with deep interest the administration of that holy ordinance from her seat in the gallery, and had been deeply impressed with her grandfather's solemn, white neck-tied appearance.

"Perhaps it is—just a little," her father replied

slowly. He was always strangely quiet on those occasions.

Did the spirit of the young wife and mother draw near, I wonder, and watch the two lonely ones that she had left behind eating her wedding-cake—in remembrance? Who knows? Perhaps she did.

“Grandpapa says I’m not a bit like my mother,” chattered Elspeth. “He says she never had a whipping in all her life. Fancy that, father! He says he slapped her hand just once, and he remembers that slap always, for he found out afterwards she hadn’t done the thing he slapped her for, and it had nearly broken her heart. She was different to me. I am not good like her. Do you think I mightn’t have another piece of cake now? Just a wee bittie?”

But her father said “No, no,” and drew her very close to him. Then he kissed her and set her down.

The little pieces of cake were finished now, and after that they ate up all the precious crumbs, and put everything away very carefully and tidily. There was still time left, before the Dragon came home, for father and child to rest a little together on the sofa, and so end that day of solemn and

beautiful things as they had begun it, in each other's arms.

And when the Dragon came in at last she hustled Elspeth off to bed, and hustled her master to the supper which she quickly set for him, and brought them both right away down to the commonplaces of daily life again by the sheer force of her personality. And it may be it was just as well they had some one so severely practical to manage them both.

CHAPTER IX

GRANDFATHER, THE ELDER

GRANDFATHER, the Elder, lived some little distance away, in a house on one of the terraces, with a little strip of garden in front where old-fashioned flowers bloomed in their season. Blue periwinkles climbed up the railings. A bed of lilies-of-the-valley lay beneath. A moss-rose occupied the place of honour in the round bed, edged with box, in the middle, and dusty miller auriculas, purple primroses, and white rockets made the air sweet all round.

He also was a widower with a housekeeper, but an even more lonely one than his son-in-law, for he was absolutely alone in the world. He had married late, and none of the children born to him had survived their infancy, except Elspeth's mother, the youngest of them all. His wife died early. Thus a father and daughter had been all the world to each other in the former generation also. When his daughter married—for he had not been so selfish as to wish to keep her always

with him—although he was very lonely, yet he had been happy in seeing her happiness, and between her husband and himself there existed a strong attachment. The two houses were not so very far apart but that the young wife could run in to see him every day, to cheer him with her bright sunny ways and still look after his house as much as was possible.

When she died, one short year later, the old man's heart, shaken as it was by so many previous griefs, seemed for a time quite broken. Indeed his mind almost seemed to be a little unhinged. As he came back from his son-in-law's house on that dreadful night when she left them, he knelt down by his desolate hearth and prayed aloud in Gaelic, which was the language of his youth, and in which he had more fluency of expression.

"O God," he prayed; "thou hast taken away the mother, the light of my eyes. Take away now, we pray Thee, the child also. We do not want it. We are two men all alone. I am too old, and its father knows nothing at all about bairns, and what can two men-folk do with an infant of days? A woman-child, too. We cannot manage a woman-child, we who have no women-folk of our own to help us. Take it away to its

mother, we beseech Thee. And we will thank Thee and bless Thee for Thy goodness all our days."

They said also that he had prayed something in Gaelic by his daughter's bedside as she lay dying, and that she had opened her eyes suddenly and looked at him, although they had thought her unconscious, and had said in quite a clear, distinct voice, "No. The baby will comfort you all." But no one understood what he had been saying except herself, and they were the last words she spoke.

However that may be, the old man's prayers were not answered. The woman-child, that undesired infant of days, flourished exceedingly.

When her nurse brought her the first time to see him, a mass of dainty cambric and lace, with the white silk hood on the little round head tied with black ribbon, in token of the babe's mourning, the newly made grandfather turned away his head and said simply, "I do not wish to see her at all."

When people asked the old man very tenderly after his infant granddaughter, he replied;

"I do not know. She is the child of desolation. The desolation of two homes."

And at last he desired the nurse not to bring her to see him any more, for he could not bear it.

"Look after her. Be kind to her, and I'll add something handsome to your wages, my good woman. But don't bring her here any more to see me," was what he said.

"What shall we call her?" asked her young father, one evening when it was getting time for her to be christened, as he sat with his head between his hands staring stonily in front of him.

"Not her mother's name," answered the grandfather sharply.

But he made no objection to her grandmother's quaint, old-fashioned name being bestowed upon her. That long-passed grief had healed. It was the agony of the new, gaping wound which for a time almost unstrung his mind. And he went himself to support her father during the trying Baptismal Service. The two broken men were a pathetic sight in the Doctor's church that day.

It was the Doctor himself who at length took his Elder to task about the child.

"You are acting wrongly," said the Doctor, and the fine voice which thundered in the pulpit was tender and soft in the house of mourning. "You are acting wrongly. God has taken away

your sweet daughter, whom you trained to be a bright and shining light, to His Higher Service in the flower of her youth. And He has sent you this child, *her* child, instead, as a token of His love, and to show you that He did not mean you to be left utterly desolate. I, myself, have lost six sons and daughters——”

“But you have six left,” interrupted the Elder.

“I have. But that does not mean that I have not known deep sorrow and bereavement in losing the six who have gone before me. I have not lost my one ewe-lamb as you have, but I know your feelings. I know, I understand, and my heart beats in sympathy with you. But I still say to you that you are acting wrongly, and that it is rebellion on your part, rebellion, pure and simple, to the Will of God.”

His words struck home. Grandfather thought it well over, and came to the conclusion that the Doctor was right and that perhaps it was rebellion. He had said “*her* child” too, and that went straight to grandfather’s broken heart and touched the parental chords there. *Her* child, therefore his too.

So when the nurse timidly passed his house with the baby next time, he tapped on the window

for her to come in, and gravely put a stick of barley-sugar in the tiny hand, which promptly dropped it.

"Never mind, sir," said the nurse consolingly; "she'll take it soon. She takes a lot of notice now, bless her, and she'll soon know when grand-papa gives her barley sugar. Won't you, my lambie?"

He did not refuse to see her any more after that. But he could not bring himself to touch her for many a long day.

As she grew older, she seemed to know instinctively that his attitude towards her was different to her father's, and, woman-like, she determined to conquer him. The eternal feminine in her awoke early. Her first tottering steps were exhibited proudly to him. Her first lisping words were heard by him rather than by her devoted father.

Then, as if to make up for the time when he could not bear to look at her, the grave, somewhat stern, old man became her willing captive, and as months passed into years she wielded the sceptre of the despot over him, while he bore his chains of slavery with submission, and even, if the truth must be told, with secret satisfaction over her

strength of character. It was perhaps some consolation to him that, except for the colour of her hair, she bore no resemblance whatever to her mother either in appearance or disposition.

"I am quite happy about her," said the Dragon to her sister, on her way to her Sunday School on fine Sunday evenings, when her lukewarm master, having betaken himself to the country for a contemplative walk with Nature—to return perhaps with the first spring violets tucked in his pocket-book for his little girl, or a jaunty wild-rose in his button-hole—as she left Elspeth, in passing, at her grandfather's door. "I am quite happy about her when I know she is with her grandfather. He would not be the Doctor's Senior Elder if he was not *very* strict, for the Doctor is very parteecular about his Elders. I knew a man once who tried to get taken on in his church as a deacon, but the Doctor catechised him with such a vengeance that he withdrew. And if he did that with a deacon, whatever kind of a stiff questioning would it be for Elders?"

She turned round as she spoke to wave her hand to Elspeth, who was now meekly standing at the door waiting for admittance.

"He will hear her say her Catechism and her

Psalm, and will see that she sits quiet with her hands folded for the rest of the evening, while he gives her an exhortation," continued the Dragon. "An Elder is just as good as a minister at the preaching sometimes."

Would he?

The Elspeth who walked so primly up the snow-white steps in the Dragon's sight, and stood so meekly waiting at the door, was not the same as the one who bounded into her grandfather's parlour a few moments later, and dashing off her hat and coat on the sofa, waited, her face wreathed in smiles, for what was to follow.

"Oh, come now, come," said her grandfather, "that's not a nice girl. You must come and say 'How do you do?' to me, politely."

"I saw you at the plate this morning," said Elspeth, in the familiar tone of one talking to a contemporary. "It was your turn. And I said 'How do you do?' to you as I went past."

"Ah, yes, but you must say it again. That was only a polite greeting in passing."

So Elspeth rose and shook hands with him gravely. They did not kiss. He was too Scotch for that and did not approve of kissing. He had never kissed her in his life. Privately, Elspeth

thought it was because he did not know how to do it.

"Now, where is my cheese-cake?" she asked.

Grandfather patted a paper bag lying beside the book he was reading.

"Your cheese-cake is here. But I want to know first what sort of a girl you have been this week. Come, sit down here and tell me how many whippings you have had."

He pushed a footstool forward for her beside his knee—a footstool festooned in multi-coloured roses in wool-work on a black ground, some more of the work of her mother's industrious fingers.

"You will not tell?" said Elspeth, leaning her elbow on his knee.

"No, I will not tell," he replied gravely. "Your confidences to me are sacred. You know that."

"Well, then, I've had six."

"Oh, dear me! That is shocking. Six in a week. That means one every day except the Sabbath."

"She never whips on Sabbaths," explained Elspeth.

"Well, now, what were they all for? What was Monday's whipping for?"

"I upset my porridge down my clean pinafore on Monday," said the delinquent glibly. "I spilt the ink-bottle on the table-cloth on Tuesday. I couldn't take the castor-oil on Wednesday——"

"Why not?" interrupted grandfather.

"Because I can't take castor-oil. It's too horrid."

"There's no such word as 'can't' in Webster's Dictionary. You *can* do *anything* if you only set your mind to it."

"I prayed about it," said Elspeth, "I did truly. And Janet prayed too, but it wasn't any use. I got it all in my mouth and it wouldn't go down. And she held my nose—and I kicked—and it spluttered all down her dress. It was her new afternoon dress too. And oh! she just *was* angry."

"Oh dear, oh dear," said grandfather, horrified. "I am afraid there is no cheese-cake for you to-night."

"Do you take castor-oil every other Wednesday night, grandpapa?" asked she, quickly turning the tables on him.

"No, indeed, I do not," said grandfather, laughing.

"Then you do not know what horrible stuff it

is. But senna-tea is worse. Janet puts senna-leaves in an old teapot and lets it stew all the evening on the kitchen hob, and the smell goes all upstairs. And I can't pray about senna-tea at all. I never try, because I just have to be whipped. I get a whole teacupful to drink and it just *won't* swallow. Janet pours it out of the teapot, and tells me to pretend it's tea without any milk in it. But how can I, with such a smell?"

Grandfather sighed. He ought to have said something here, because he was an Elder. It was a grand opportunity lost. But he only said:

"Well, what about Thursday?"

"Let me see, what did I do on Thursday? Oh, I fell down and cut my new stockings. And I cut my knee too, but Janet said that didn't matter a bit. It only served me right for not looking where I was going. And on Friday I couldn't say my text. And on Saturday father stole two pieces of loaf-sugar, and Janet blamed me——"

"Oh, come, come! What was that?"

"It is true, grandpapa. He stole two pieces of loaf-sugar out of the sugar-basin. He often does. And he offered one to me, but I was fright-

ened Janet would see it, so I didn't take it. And he said, 'Don't tell on me,' and he went out crunching it up. He likes sugar every bit as much as me. He is just a big boy, father is. Janet says so," she added, with a maternal air.

"Well, what happened then?"

"Well, Janet whipped me. She said she counted the pieces and there were ten left when father had finished his breakfast, and that I had told her a fearful story. She whips awfully hard for stories."

Grandfather compressed his lips. They were firm lips, and his chin was firm too.

"I think we'll have to put a stop to some of this," he said.

"You promised you wouldn't tell, grandpapa. Now I want my cheese-cake, please."

She knew he would keep his word or she would never have risked telling him.

He handed her the paper bag and watched her eat the cheese-cake in it, a circular hollow of feathery puff-pastry crowned by a pyramid of macaroon, a triumph of the art of the professional pastry-cook in the Land o' Cakes. She ate it slowly, with the air of an epicure, taking the outside first as being least attractive to the palate.

GRANDFATHER, THE ELDER 131

Stay a moment, Time, while I sketch Grandfather, the Elder. Whose eye should remember him like mine? Whose pencil ought to sketch him better? He has been gone these five-and-thirty years, and the world in which he lived has forgotten all about him long ago. But I remember. He did not like kissing, yet God kissed him into sleep, and he knew not death, only a quiet sleep and a bright awakening. For the food that I have eaten and the raiment I have worn these many weary years in the wilderness, and in the shadow of the prison-house, I am indebted, humanly speaking, to his love and to his foresight. The very grave where they laid him belongs to me. It is my right, then, to pause a moment here, lest the day should come when even I may forget.

The rays of the setting sun are lingering on his abundant silver hair, making an aureole about his head, as he leans back by the window watching his little grandchild eat her cake. His straight, beautiful hair falling almost to his shoulders, after the picturesque fashion of his youth. There is a touch of the pedagogue about his thin, rather long-shaped, clever face. He had been a schoolmaster in his early days, and the firm, un-

wrinkled hand resting on the arm of his chair had wielded the cane many a time, although now it only had acquaintance—a prosperous acquaintance—with the ledger and the desk. No lack of discipline with his male pupils had ever been put down to his account, although his small granddaughter could now wind him round her little finger. He is clean-shaven, his features clearly cut. A certain sternness about the mouth is belied by the kindly expression of his eyes, which are blue, limpid, and clear, looking through gold-rimmed spectacles with a shrewd but slightly quizzical gaze upon his fellow-men. An observant face, keen, thoughtful, the dignity of the clansman easily apparent, albeit he is the most humble-minded of men. His face is ruddy with the hue of health and a naturally fair complexion, as becomes one who has been brought up

“In the Highlands, in the country places,
Where the old, plain men have rosy faces
And the young, fair maidens
Quiet eyes.”

His figure, spare, active, lithe, at threescore-and-ten, he is even a dapper old man, particular both in dress and speech. His elbow-chair, of black oak with a horsehair seat, is hard and uncomfortable.

The men and women of his generation did not lounge. Do I not know it? When I broke its left elbow off three times through sitting side-saddle on it, and he said I would land him in the Bankruptcy Court.

But now the cheese-cake is finished and Elspeth has drawn closer with her next demand. One could hardly call it a request.

"I am ready now to curl your hair, grandpapa. It is most terrible straight this week. If I put it in papers soon it'll have time to be nice and curly before I go home."

"My dear little girl," said he, the instinct of the dominie awake, "you must *not* say 'most terrible.' It is ungrammatical to begin with. If you must use such awe-inspiring words, say 'terribly,' not 'most terrible.' But I do not like them at all in ordinary conversation. They are quite unnecessary. There is nothing 'terrible' nor 'awful,' to my mind, except the Day of Judgment."

"Well, your hair is *very* straight indeed to-night, grandpapa," said Elspeth obediently.

"It will always be straight until the end of the chapter, I fear."

"Was it always quite straight when you were a little boy?"

"Always."

"Did your mother never crimp it?"

"No."

"How nice for you. Then you never knew what ruggy-tuggy hair was, like mine?"

"No, never."

"But you do like curly hair best, don't you?" she wheedled, drawing closer to him and bobbing her curls in his face.

"Yes, I do," he said, laying an affectionate hand on her head. "Your mother had curls, and your grandmother—that other Elspeth."

"And the Laird," added she. "Then you'll let me curl yours early to-night, won't you, grand-papa, dear? And you'll go to bed in your papers?"

The Elder shook his head.

"I couldn't do that. What would Mrs. McIntyre say when she came in to prayers to see me with my hair in papers?"

And he smiled at the thought of his prim, rather stiffly-starched Highland housekeeper finding him in such a plight.

"Well, I'll do it up in two rows then to-night,

tighter than I did last week, and let it have as long as it can."

"First of all, I think," said grandfather, "we'll have that Psalm of yours, or you won't know it for Janet to-morrow, and you'll start the week with whippings again, and that would be a pity. Now, don't drone it, for I cannot stand droning. We'll have you taught elocution by and by."

"What is that?"

"You'll find out presently. Now then."

She repeated her Psalm two or three times before she pleased him. He was so very particular, and it was difficult to stop the familiar droning as taught by Janet. Then he asked her all the commandments, and she finished up very hurriedly with;

"Now, grandpapa, for the papers."

"Not yet," he evaded. "Wait till the gas is lit and the blinds down. People can see me from the road. You can amuse yourself with the things in the table drawer for a little."

There was not much in the table drawer, but anything can be a treasure to a child. An old cloth map of London, a pair of blunt compasses, a copy of the gospel of St. John in raised type

for the blind, and a box of coloured wafers, such as had been in use before the days of adhesive envelopes, were all deeply interesting to Elspeth. A strange collection surely. She took out the book in raised type and went to her grandfather to blindfold her with his pocket handkerchief. Then she spelt some of the words, slowly and with difficulty, feeling each letter out with her fingers.

"Well," she said at last, with a sigh. "I wouldn't be blind for anything. It is such slow work. Now you read, grandpapa."

He laid the book on his knee and closed his eyes. Then passing his fingers rapidly over the raised letters, he read in the swift and easy manner of the educated blind.

"Oh, you're just wonderful, grandpapa, you're so clever," Elspeth said with great admiration. "How long were you blind?"

"I was blind for three years," he replied, "and for a long time after that was not allowed to read any books."

"It was chicken-pox made you blind, wasn't it?"

"No, it was the smallpox. My father died of it and I became blind."

"Is it worse than chicken-pox?" asked Els-

peth, with a lively recollection of having it on her head and of the Dragon's rough comb ploughing through her hair.

"Oh, yes, much worse. There is not much smallpox now, thank God! When I was young nearly everybody you met was pitted with it or disfigured in some way or other."

"Then you were blind and had to learn to read like this. And a clever doctor came——" prompted Elspeth, who had heard it all a hundred times before.

"And a clever doctor came and said he thought he could operate and restore my sight. And he did so. My mother held my hand all the time. There was no chloroform in those days," said grandfather, with a shudder. "But I have never seen very well with one of my eyes."

Elspeth patted his hand sympathetically. "Never mind, grandpapa," she said, "you can see better with your one good eye than lots of people can with two. Janet says I can see through a deal door with *mine*, and I am sure you see as well as I do."

Her grandfather laughed.

There was a slight diversion here, as Mrs. McIntyre came in to light the gas and pull down the

blinds. Grandfather gave her an order, to which she replied in Gaelic, having, as she expressed it, "fery little English."

When she had gone Elspeth jumped up hastily.

"Now, grandpapa, quick, the papers."

"Oh, dear, I thought you had forgotten," said the victim. But he meekly produced from his coat-tail pocket, where, by the way, they had been secreted all the time, a small packet of curl-papers and an old-fashioned pocket-comb in a shagreen case.

"You are a most self-willed girl, I think," he said, as she climbed up on the arm of his chair and tucked his big handkerchief round his neck, after the manner of the professional barber.

"Two rows to-night, and as tight as I can screw them," replied the tyrant firmly. "Your hair *has just got to be curly* to-night, whether it likes it or not."

Grandfather took his spectacles off and laid them in his Bible for a marker. He closed his eyes, and, sighing slightly, leant back and surrendered himself into the hands of the skilled operator, who had been practising on her dolls all the week.

It was done at last. Two rows, tightly screwed

all round the venerable head, curl-papers sticking out like little horns in all directions. Grandfather's eyes looked strained with the tightness of them above his ears.

"It is not very tight here, is it, grandpapa?" asked the hairdresser, patting his head and peeping round into his face.

"No—no," said he guardedly, "not very."

"Rags would be ever so much softer for you, and I could tie them. I wouldn't need to twist them so tight. Janet often gives me rags for my dolls' hair. I think I'll ask her to give me some for yours."

"No, no *no*," said grandfather emphatically. "That you certainly shall not."

"Well, then, I am afraid you'll just have to grin and bear it. That is what Janet says to me when my hair is tuggy. You can put your glasses on now and read, if you like, and I'll go and play with the map. I want your hair to be as curly to-night as the Laird's."

It is rather difficult to adjust spectacles on the top of stiff curl-papers, but at last grandfather managed it and pretended to read, keeping his eyes fixed, however, on the child, wondering whatever she was doing with the map.

A map is a fine thing for the imagination. This must have been a very old one, for, although it showed miles upon miles of the streets of London town, there were many green oases in the suburbs which Elspeth could not find when she looked for them in reality. Kensington was the old Kensington of Miss Thackeray, full of country mansions with walled-in gardens and pleasaunces. Primrose Hill showed green fields dotted with trees, full apparently of blossom, where one might seek, and perchance even find, the primroses which gave it its name. Spring Gardens appeared to be really gardens. The Round Pond and the Serpentine looked very blue on the map, in those other gardens which Peter Pan has claimed now for his very own.

Elspeth ran round and round them with her father after her—figuratively speaking. When the compasses were folded up, and trotted on “their knees,” as Elspeth expressed it, they were herself. When they strode along on their blunt points, taking mighty strides, they were her father. If they stopped at the corner of a road in the West End—it was always near where the Queen lived—he had lost her and was asking a policeman, “Have you seen my little girl any-

where?" Then you saw him hurrying in whatever direction the policeman said.

If you saw the compasses on their knees making lowly—if rather stiff—genuflexions towards the roadway, the Queen was passing, and was stopping her carriage to inquire;

"Who is that little Scotch girl with the auburn curls?" (The Queen would never be so rude as to catch the wrong tint.) "Would she like to come and see my dolls'-house in Kensington Palace?"

Of course she would.

Then hand in hand, Elspeth and her father would walk meekly and humbly, as became loyal and dutiful subjects, past the sentries, the Queen having driven in first with a haughty wave of her hand, directing, "Allow these people to pass. They are my guests."

Grandfather watched the child playing with the compasses for a long time. He said, "Extraordinary," to himself once or twice. He was practical and matter-of-fact, and had never known what it was to be troubled (or gifted) with an imagination in his whole life.

Then his eyes fell upon his Bible with the recollection of Whose holy day it was, and soon

he had forgotten the unwonted discomfort of his head and was deep in the woes of the minor prophets.

Time passed. Both were absorbed. The one in the past, the other in visions of a golden future, when the door opened quietly and Elspeth's father walked in. Neither of them had heard his quiet step.

Grandfather rose, smiling and hospitable, holding out his hand in welcome. Not until his son-in-law burst out into an uncontrollable fit of laughter did he remember the condition of his head. Then the old man tore at his hair, his face crimson with shame and annoyance.

"This bairn! this bairn!" he cried. "She'll be the unmaning of me. Come and help, Elspeth, you little monkey. Mrs. McIntyre will be in directly with the supper."

But wicked Elspeth shook her head and disappeared under the table. Grandfather pulled and tugged at his tightly-twisted curl-papers and trampled them fiercely underfoot. Two still remained, twisted and entangled with silver hairs, over his right ear, when Mrs. McIntyre entered with the supper tray. Grandfather covered them with his hand, flung himself into his armchair,

and leant hurriedly against the embroidered bell-rope hanging on the wall, in deep dejection.

The Doctor's Senior Elder on a Sabbath night!

Mrs. McIntyre, a grave, elderly widow, in black, with a white cap edged with crimped frills, tied neatly in a muslin bow under her chin, and the black velvet widow's band lying across her smooth grey hair, moved quietly round the table arranging plates and glasses. Elspeth's father addressed a pleasant remark or two to her, which she answered in her soft Highland tones.

Grandfather pressed his head firmly against the bell-rope and gazed moodily into the fire. His hair was distinctly crimpy all round to-night. The hairdresser had done her work well. There was something to show for all the discomfort he had endured.

At last the housekeeper looked straight at him, and addressed a question to him which required a direct answer.

"If you please, will you hef toddy or negus to-night, sir?"

He replied without looking round, holding his head stiffly on one side.

"Toddy—negus—toddy—oh, whatever you have." The last, in despair, to his son-in-law.

The younger man answered, to cover his confusion, "We'll have toddy to-night, thank you, Mrs. McIntyre." His own lips were twitching, and smothered giggles came from under the table.

"Now, Elspeth, come out at once," her father said, as soon as the housekeeper had left the room, "and take the papers out of your grandpapa's hair."

"I do not know what the Doctor would say to me," said Grandfather, the Elder, rather ruefully, trying to flatten out his frizzed white hair with his hand, while the curl-papers which he had been trampling on blazed merrily in the fire.

"And I don't know what Janet would say either, which is much more to the point," said the younger man significantly. "I think I shall have to tell her what goes on here on Sunday evenings with you two."

"Oh, no, no," cried Elspeth, clambering up on his knee and kissing him.

"You're just a spoilt girl, that's what you are. And I don't know which of us spoils you the most."

But Elspeth soon settled that question.

"Grandpapa does, *of course*," she said.

CHAPTER X

A KNIGHT ERRANT

ELSPETH first fell under the spell of a very interesting and magnetic personality at the mature age of four-and-a-half.

The kind nurse and foster-mother, who had brought her up from her birth, having gone out to America with her own husband and child, the Dragon had a relay of nursemaids who had given her much trouble.

"I suppose it is having no lady in the house," she said, at last appealing to her master, "they take advantage of me because they think I am just a servant like themselves. I really think I could manage the child better by myself, if she could just be occupied for a few hours in the mornings while I am busy, to keep her out of mischief. I have plenty of time to take her out walks in the afternoons."

So her master, after thinking it over a little and consulting with grandfather, walked up the square one evening to the house at the corner,

where a brass plate on the gate announced that it was:—

“The Misses Stewarts’ Select Seminary for Young Ladies.”

In small letters in the corner there was the word “Juniors.” For the young ladies were very junior indeed.

Grandfather also walked up later the same evening and had a talk with the two ladies.


“If her father decides to send my little grandchild to you,” he said to Miss Georgina Stewart, the mild, sweet-faced elder sister who taught sewing and embroidery; “I do not wish her to be overworked at the sewing-class with needlework. I always feel with great regret that her mother sewed too much. She would have been stronger had she not sat sewing and embroidering so continually as she did, and had gone out more into the open air.”

Miss Georgina smiled, and promised that the child should not be overworked with needlework while in their care.

It was all settled later, and Elspeth started her schooldays one bright, clear morning in September.

Nobody called it a Kindergarten, or any

other such deceptive name. You went to the Misses Stewarts', even at the age of four-and-a-half (they took no young lady over eight), for undisguised learning. You learned the three R's, you inked your fingers, and were smartly rapped over the knuckles for it by Miss Maria. You learned to hem pocket-handkerchiefs under Miss Georgina's gentler tuition, with hot, sticky needles, and thread that turned dirty in no time, and you left blood tracks all the way along the hem, so that you could be recognised by your trail, so to speak. You knitted cotton garters which were interminable for length, and you crocheted cotton mats which were absolutely of no use whatever, except for slipping about on wash-stands and endangering the crockery. You worked kettle-holders in little dabs and squares and triangles of coloured wool, which vanished on their completion, and reappeared on the last day of the term, so magnificent with velveteen backs and brilliant loops of ribbon or cord, that you did not recognise your own handiwork, but had to be introduced to it again. And if Miss Stewart's ancient method was a somewhat laborious fashion of learning to read and write, with no cunning devices of word-building and such-



like, it was a very good training in patience and perseverance, and helped to form stronger characters by and by.

Elspeth's first schoolday being on a Monday morning, the Dragon was too busy to take her up to school herself. She pinned a little red shawl of Rob Roy tartan (which was most unbecoming to her complexion) carefully across her chest, and put on her hat for her. Then she watched her walk up alone from their own gate at the foot of the square until she turned into Miss Stewart's at the top corner, nodding her head encouragingly with rapid nods for her to go on, whenever the child turned round to look wistfully back.

Elspeth, very puffed up and inflated outside with her own importance at being a schoolgirl, very trembling and quivering in that inner Elspeth which nobody saw and few guessed anything about, walked somewhat slowly and reluctantly. She carried a brand-new pair of strap shoes buttoned together over one arm, and on the other a new school-bag, neatly made of crimson baize with a handle of plaited black braid. Inside, if you could have looked, you would have seen a little new reading-book of grey

linen. (They never professed to teach you "without tears." It would have been false if they had.) And on the cover, neatly written in the Dragon's best round hand, in the same way as her own mother had written her name at the beginning of her own schooldays some forty years before (for the Dragon too had been a child once, however difficult it was to believe it), was the name:—

"Elspeth Arnot. Her book."

There was also a little square of canvas, bound round with white tape, with a wool-needle in it (Miss Georgina provided the gaily-coloured wools for the geometrical patterns), and another small and dainty bag made of pale blue silk. That was to hold the tickets which Miss Maria gave out at the conclusion of every scholastic day, when you dropped your parting curtsy to her at the schoolroom door. The precious tickets, with good, bad, or middling, written on them, according to your behaviour, or sins of omission and commission. Woe betide you if you had lost any of them when Miss Maria added them up on Fridays! And woe betide Elspeth in the days to come when the Dragon found a "middling" one in the blue silk bag!

Elsbeth passed inside the Misses Stewarts' formidable iron gate with a tremulous wave of her hand to the familiar figure, standing a little patch of pale colour in her neat working dress of lilac print, with the strings of her frilled morning cap flying out behind her in the breeze, at the foot of the square. The Dragon gave an answering wave and ran back to her work.

"Well, I'm glad she's gone," she said. "I really thought she was going to run back."

But to see a child go in at a gate, and to be quite sure it has reached its destination, are two vastly different matters.

Elsbeth walked bravely up the wide gravel path, and clambered up the front steps, holding on to the iron railings, her heart thumping furiously with each step. She looked round fearfully when she reached the top. No one was to be seen. On turning her attention to the door, she found to her horror that the knocker was beyond her reach. She tried to turn the door-handle. It was a fixture, a mere ornament, not meant for use. Then she tried to reach the bell. By dint of jumping high she could just touch it. She laid down her bag and shoes and jumped as high as she could, trying to reach it enough to

hold on to it. In the middle of her fifth useless jump she heard the sound of unmistakable giggles, and, looking down, saw a cluster of little faces watching her in great merriment from a basement window.

That was enough. She jumped no more, but, leaning as far out of their sight as she could, timidly rapped at the door for admission with her small knuckles again and again. No one came. She heard the tramp of children's feet far away in the distance and the merry hum and chatter of many little voices. There was a lull, and then the sound of the rising of an infant's morning hymn. She was too late. School had begun. The Dragon had been telling her only that very morning of the enormity of the sin of playing truant, and here she was doing it on her very first day. She could bear no more, her overcharged heart was bursting. Tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. They trickled down the Rob Roy tartan shawl to her new cambric pinafore. They splashed on the freshly washed step. It had rained in the night, and soot had fallen on the railings. She laid her face on them and sobbed as if her heart would break. Life could have no worse horrors for her than this. She had been

early taught self-restraint, so she seldom cried aloud, like other children, unless she was in a temper. So now she sobbed quietly and unceasingly, deep convulsive sobs, coming straight up from a very broken heart, which shook her whole body, rubbing her sooty hands all over her face meanwhile.

Surely fair lady was never in greater plight when knight-errant appeared on the scene.

It was Hendry, swinging his strap-full of books and whistling a merry tune. He was late too, and was hurrying. His High School bell—that High School which now holds his name in veneration as one of the most illustrious of its many gifted scholars—was ringing its last tocsin-like notes away far up the hill amongst the trees.

Elspeth saw him coming and held her breath. He was one of Freddy's big brothers and she knew him very well by sight, but hitherto had never exchanged a personal word with him. And she was terrified of boys in general and of big boys in particular.

He saw her as he passed the gate and stopped short.

"Hallo! What's this?" he called out.

There was no answer. Between terror and

grief the lady was speechless. Her shy, sooty face was hidden behind her pinafore.

He swung the gate open and ran up the gravel path, and with two flying bounds was up the steps at her side.

"Hallo, Elspeth! What are you doing here?" he said gently. "Can't you get in? Have you come to begin school at Miss Stewart's? Why ever did they let you come by yourself? You've come to the wrong door. The children go round the corner to the other gate at the side. They don't come to the front door at all. Oh, don't cry again," he added hastily. "See, I'll ring the bell for you and knock loud. I can't stop to see you in, for I am late myself. I shall be locked out."

The High School bell tolled its last notes as he spoke. But he stopped to ring a terrific peal on the bell and to give a thundering knock at the door before he ran off. It would not have been Hendry to have left any one in distress, even if he were caned for it. He had only gone a step or two when he ran back again.

"See, Elspeth, dear,"—that word which always comes so slowly from Scottish lips—"do you like chocolates? You can have my piece."

He was off again before she could thank him.

When the servant opened the door a few moments later it was to find a tear-bedewed maiden standing there, albeit with a little wan smile on her sooty face and a long stick of chocolate cream in its magic silver wrapping firmly clasped in her hand. A red-letter day, indeed, for Elspeth had never tasted chocolate in the whole course of her short life before. It was an introduction to Hendry and the evanescent joys of chocolate cream at the same time.

That was the beginning of Hendry's magnetism for her, sealed and ratified with a stick of chocolate cream. After that, every time she went to his home, which she always called "Freddy's house," it was with the shy hope that she would see again the kind big boy who had befriended her in her sorrow. Sometimes she did see him. As she played in the large deserted nursery in his home—for the boys had all grown out of it, and the girls were young ladies now, Freddy had been the little Benjamin of his family—with the kind nurse sewing beside the window, Hendry sometimes came bounding in. Once or twice he rode her on his back round the garden, and took her

to see the peaches growing in the glass-houses. Another joyous red-letter day he turned the tap on in the bath and gave her his boats to play with, showing her how to blow hurricanes with the bellows. What a day of gales and wet pinafores that was! All these little kindnesses on Hendry's part won Elspeth's lonely little heart, as he was to win the hearts of thousands of his fellow-men in after years.

Many things have been written about that wonderful magnetic personality. Few, I think, have written very much about him as a boy. It was only as a boy that Elspeth knew him and loved him, but years afterwards, when far away from old scenes and friends, she read of his premature death, no heart grieved more truly and deeply than hers over this much-admired friend of her childhood.

The obituary notices did not spell his name as I have done. That was the Dragon's pronunciation and Elspeth's. There was a word put before it, and a surname after it. But it was the same Hendry.

I saw his photograph only the other day on the paper cover of a cheap edition of one of his

books, and gazed once more at the kind hazel eyes and wealth of wavy, auburn hair, which I doubt if anybody had even been so unkind as to call "red" in the whole history of his happy life.

CHAPTER XI

THE LONDON LADIES

IT was a Sabbath to be remembered. Outside, the north wind howled and shrieked and blew a perfect blizzard of snow against the bedroom window and down the chimney. Elspeth's father had risen and pulled the blind up so that they could lie and watch the whirling eddies of snow. Certainly there would be no church for either Elspeth or the Dragon that day, unless the weather improved. Janet would not risk being lost in a snow-wreath on her way to hers. So, as there was no hurry to get up, her master had sent his shaving water downstairs again when it was brought up, and now he and Elspeth were indulging in the luxury of "a long lie" in the shape of half an hour extra in bed together.

Elspeth lay snugly cuddled with her father's arm round her and her hand tucked in his. She was in a delicate grey and green arbour. The soft silk damask curtains of the Arabian bed-

stead formed a tent. The pattern on them was of vine-leaves and tendrils, with clusters of grapes festooned all over in tender shades of grey and green, which lent a Southern touch at once. Sometimes Elspeth was in the great Sahara, transported thither on a camel and was a dweller in tents like the patriarchs. Sometimes she was on India's coral strand—or elsewhere. Wherever the magic carpet of her thoughts transported her. She was seldom in a commonplace bed. She lay still now, thinking deeply, with her eyes fixed on the curtains.

"A penny for your thoughts," said her father suddenly.

"I wasn't thinking exactly, father. I was just 'maging."

"Well, what is that but thinking?" laughed her father. "A penny for your imaginations then."

"I thought we were shipwrecked on a desert island," replied Elspeth, who had been reading a child's illustrated edition of "Robinson Crusoe." "We had been wandering on the beach all night and had lain down and gone to sleep. And a gourd had grown up over us like Jonah's, only it had grapes on it. That was all. We were all

alone, and all the world to each other," she concluded fervently.

"Where was grandfather and the Laird?"

"I don't know. They did not seem to be there. It was just you and me. And we were all the world to each other," she repeated again.

"As we are," said her father.

"And now I give you your penny back," said Elspeth gravely, "for you were thinking too."

"Yes, I was thinking too. I was thinking that my little girl is growing up, and that soon she will be too big to come into her father's bed on Saturday nights to sleep with him any more."

"I shall never be too big for *that*," said Elspeth, nestling closer on his arm.

"Oh, yes, you will. Were you six or seven last birthday?"

"I was seven, father."

"I thought so. Then we'll have to see about having a room made for yourself soon. Your mother and I were going to have turned the large box-room upstairs into a nursery, had she lived. It was to have had a big bow window put in it. I think we will have it made into a room for you. It would have a beautiful view at the back. Right over the tops of the houses

to the river, and away out ever so far. You might even be able to see the sea on a clear day."

"Should I see Auntie Rosie's cottage and the brig?"

"Bridge," corrected her father. "And who, may I ask, is Auntie Rose?"

"Why, she is the washerwoman, father. Don't you know?"

Her father shook his head. He was not domesticated, and of the Dragon's employés he knew nothing.

"Yes, you will be able to see the bridge from the window, and perhaps you may even get a distant view of the sea," he continued. "I don't know about the cottage, for I don't know where it is. We'll have a little Arabian bed for you like this that you are so fond of, so that you may still think you are in a tent. I saw some chintz in a shop the other day that I thought would make very pretty bed-curtains for you. It had moss rose-buds and lilies of the valley on it. And we'll have a rose-bud paper on the wall for a rose-bud girl. The rose is the Queen of Flowers."

"That would be very nice," said Elspeth. "I

should like a pretty room like that. And then if I was up there I could come creeping—creeping—downstairs to your bed *every* morning early and Janet would never know.”

Her father laughed, but soon became thoughtful again.

“I have been wondering very much sometimes,” he said presently, “if you would like to have a mother. Fathers don’t make very good mothers for little girls when they are growing up.”

“Oh, yes, they *do*,” said the child eagerly, “they make darling mothers. But I would like to have my own mother too,” she added wistfully.

“I’m afraid you cannot have her back again,” the father said, with a sigh. “But there is such a thing as having another mother, you know.”

Elspeth’s eyes opened very round and wide.

“Can widow-men——” she began.

“Widowers,” he corrected again.

“Widowers—marry again, then?”

“Yes,” responded her father, “they can.”

“Janet’s sister is going to be married again in the summer. She is going to marry the beadle in Mr. Morrison’s church. They call him ‘muckle Geordie’ because he’s so big,” chattered

Elspeth, with little idea of what was coming. "But I didn't know widow-men—widowers, I mean—could marry again. Then grandpapa could marry again?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then," said Elspeth firmly, "I'll tell him to marry Mrs. McIntyre at once. I told the Laird to marry Mistress Kate long ago. He has been an old bachelor far too long, but he hasn't done it yet. But grandpapa shall do it at once."

"I am afraid he won't do that," laughed her father.

"Grandpapa always does whatever I tell him," said the despot.

"He does a great deal that you tell him, I admit. A great deal too much, I think. But you'll find he won't do that, even to please you."

"And you, father," said Elspeth, ignoring the interruption, "you can marry Janet, if you like. Then we can go on just the same."

"But I am afraid I should not want to marry Janet."

"She'd make you a very good wife, father," went on the small arbiter of destiny. "She can cook, and sew, and look after us both very well. Grandpapa says Janet is a very thrifty woman."

He says he'll give her her due, although there is no love lost between them."

"Oh, yes, no doubt she is all that. But—well, she is not—not exactly—a lady, is she?"

Elspeth stared aghast. She did not like ladies.

"Would a new mother have to be—a—*lady*?" she stammered.

"Certainly. I don't think I should care to marry any one else."

Elspeth drew a long breath.

"O—oh!" she said. Her mind ran rapidly over the circle of their lady friends. Then she laughed gaily.

"Why, we don't know anybody. They're all married, father. Except the Miss Stewarts, and they are old. Grandpapa says my mother used to go to their school when she was a little girl like me, and that they taught *her* to sew. So we'll just go on as we are doing," she concluded, "and I'll keep house for you when I am grown-up."

Her father looked a little embarrassed. She was making it difficult for him. A slight flush spread over the tan of his manly cheeks.

"What do you say——" he asked; "would you like—one of the London ladies for a mother?"

Then Elspeth's face fell suddenly. Her

thoughts flew back to one miserable day in the autumn, when, running hastily in from morning school, with inky face and dun-coloured fingers, her little red tartan shawl pinned clumsily across her chest, her hat on anyhow, and her hair blowing in frowsy tangles in every direction, the Dragon had sharply told her that she was wanted upstairs in the drawing-room immediately.

"Am I not to wash my face and hands, or have my hair tidied, or anything, first?" she had asked, and had been sharply answered "No."

She had gone upstairs just as she was, and in horror-stricken silence had there been introduced by her father to two very fashionable strange ladies, who were seated on the drawing-room sofa.

"This is my little girl," said he, drawing her forward. "But why——" he asked, and when he drew his bushy, dark eyebrows close together like that it showed that he was greatly annoyed, "why has Janet allowed you to come upstairs so untidy?"

He hastily unpinned her shawl and took off her hat himself, and pushed her forward, looking quite cross.

The ladies seated on the sofa smiled, and

greeted her with soft words spoken with a finicking English accent. But she heard the elder of the two whisper the word "terrible" to the younger, and the younger murmur two words in French in reply. They were drawing-room ladies of the very worst and most fussy and particular type.

They were dressed in simple printed muslins, and had large flat floppy hats with long ostrich feathers round them, but it was the simplicity which costs much money. Their muslin skirts gave out the rustle of silk foundations worn underneath whenever they moved, and their gloves, of the palest lavender tint, were so spotless and delicate that the marks of Elspeth's grubby fingers showed plainly where she had touched them when she shook hands. They were very much alike, only the younger had a curl dangling gracefully over one shoulder. The other had none.

"Now, we'll have some music," said her father, with alacrity, unlocking the piano and passing his handkerchief lightly over the keys. "We do not often have such a treat, and my little girl inherits a great love of music. Now, Miss Lilian, I have had the piano tuned on purpose for you."

The elder of the two ladies rose with some

laughing remark. The younger smilingly drew the shy, awkward child beside her on the sofa.

Then Miss Lilian sang, song after song, and Elspeth gazed stiffly at this stranger turning over her mother's music with careless hand, singing her mother's favourite songs with laugh and merry remark. She gazed, bewildered, at her father too, leaning on the piano, turning over the music, laughing and joking with this strange lady, pleading for "just one more." His eyes were sparkling with animation and pleasure, and he joined his rich baritone voice in a duet with her to wind up with, murmuring some remark in an undertone as he did so, a remark which brought a very becoming blush to the lady's cheek, and to which she replied by a gleam of white teeth.

In vain the younger lady on the sofa tried to attract the child's attention to herself, asking her about her lessons and how many pets she had. Elspeth had never had any pets, and lessons were nowhere in the world compared to her father, whom she adored. Her eyes remained glued to the scene at the piano.

When at last the ladies went away, her father had been cross with her, and had reproved her rather sharply for her "bad manners." He had

also reproved Janet for letting her come upstairs in such a disreputable state, and Janet had pursed up her lips and remained in one of her tempers for some days afterwards.

Altogether the London ladies' visit had been by no means a pleasant memory. And here was her father asking her if she would like him to marry one of them! He repeated his question, after waiting a little, looking at her very seriously. He evidently meant it.

"Would you like to have one of the London ladies for a mother?"

Elspeth then, seeing that an answer was expected of her, stammered hastily;

"Father—I think—the one sitting on the sofa was—perhaps—*rather* nice."

"They were both sitting on the sofa," he replied blandly. So they had been for some time before Elspeth appeared on the scene, and he had feasted his eyes on the two dainty visions in muslin and lace, who had seemed to bring a gleam of brightness into that desolate and empty drawing-room.

"The one who talked to me, I mean, father; the youngest one. The one with the curl—who didn't sing with you."

"Ah! Miss Constance. Well, I fear I cannot marry Miss Constance. She is engaged already, and goes out to Hong Kong to her fiancé in the spring. It is Miss Lilian I want."

Elspeth's heart sank. It was evidently all settled. Gentle and easily influenced as he was, her father could yet put his foot down on occasion. He was not to be wheedled or coaxed like the Laird. He was certainly never to be commanded like grandfather. Tears managed him sometimes, but this was hardly a subject for tears. So Elspeth, with a sinking heart, felt it was no use saying anything. She pushed her small hand closer into his.

"Are you going to marry her, father?" she asked, very simply. And he answered as simply, but with a smile of radiant happiness on his face;

"Yes."

Elspeth sighed a little weary sigh. Child as she was, she felt the old life slipping away and would fain have clung on to it with both hands if she could.

But her father was speaking.

"It is a secret," he said. "We do not wish it talked about. Miss Lilian cannot leave her parents just after her sister goes. So our marriage

will not be just yet. I want you to promise not to tell Janet, for she might make it very unpleasant for us both."

"I won't tell Janet," said Elspeth.

"And it would be better not to tell grandpapa either. I will tell him myself when the right time comes. He does not know the ladies at all, and might feel it a little."

This promise was more difficult to give. For Elspeth treated the Elder as a comrade and confidential friend, confiding everything to him, even to the scrapes she continually got into both at school and with Janet, well knowing that they never went any further, for grandfather was true as steel.

"Very well, father," she said at last. "I won't tell grandpapa either—if I can help it. And the Laird?" she inquired.

"The Laird," laughed her father, "is snowed up in his Highland fastnesses. You are not likely to see him. I'll be bound the snow is lying in wreaths up to his hedges just now, and he is buried deep in his Greek and Hebrew lexicons."

"It is a very big secret, then, father."

"Yes, for the present, a very big secret. She

only accepted me last night, in a letter—conditionally,” he added.

He did not say what the conditions were. One of them was that the child should be sent away to a boarding-school to be made fit for civilised society. Another, that the crusty, determined-looking Dragon should disappear for ever from the family life.

At this moment Janet knocked at the door with the hot water for the second time, and Elspeth, carefully enveloped in her father’s big dressing-gown, went away to dress by the blazing kitchen fire.

It is a terrible thing to be burdened with a great and weighty secret, especially in the winter holidays when you have no companions to share it with. To be entrusted with it on a stormy Sabbath too, when you cannot even go to church to take it off, so to speak, for a time, is worst of all.

Twenty times that snowy Sabbath morning, as Elspeth sat in the kitchen beside Janet learning her Psalm and texts, or singing her favourite hymns, with her restless hands folded in her lap, and her fidgety feet carefully kept off the spar of her chair, was she on the point of telling the whole

story to the Dragon. It was her very first secret, and she found it a most intolerable burden.

"I must tell some one or I shall burst," she said to herself at last. The thought of her father's displeasure alone kept her from blurting the whole thing out. At last she thought of a round-about way.

"Janet," she began; then hesitated, for the mere mention of the London ladies always seemed in some unaccountable way to make Janet cross.

"Well," said the Dragon, "why don't you finish saying a thing when you begin it?"

"I was wondering. Do you think one of the London ladies would make a——" good mother, she was going to say. But Janet turned sharply round from the kitchen sink, where she was busy peeling potatoes, and stopped her short.

"Now, just you look here," said she, and her face was more flushed and angry than the occasion warranted. "If you don't leave off talking about those London ladies, I shall have to punish you. You've done nothing but talk, talk, talk, about them—silly, dressed-up puppets that they are—ever since they were here. And if you think they'd make anything for you, you are under a big mistake. If it is a muslin dress like theirs for

your best doll, like you wanted, I doubt if either of them could do anything so sensible as make a doll's dress. I shouldn't think they could hold a needle in their hands, let alone use it. And you have no business thinking about your dolls on the Sabbath Day either."

"It wasn't a doll's dress I was wondering if they would make," said Elspeth meekly.

"Well, I don't care what it was. Don't you mention them to me again. I saw them laughing and giggling when they went away that day. At you and your father, no doubt. I hope they never enter this house again while I am here, that's all."

So Elspeth subsided hastily.

"If I had only a cat," she whispered to herself; "or if I might just bring out Eliza Jane to tell her, it wouldn't be so bad. Oh, I wish father hadn't told me about it." She sighed heavily, and Janet, turning round again, softened when she saw the child's wistful little face.

"You may go upstairs now and watch for your father coming home from church, if you like. You can put the table-cloth on for me, and put out the mats and the table-napkins, and make yourself useful," she said graciously.

Elspeth went away upstairs with alacrity. When she had done these small duties, and put her father's slippers down to warm at the fire, she gazed out at the window on the spotless scene. The grey square was transformed into a glistening fairyland of whiteness, the trees were all burdened and bowed down with their heavy weight of spotless snow. Not a living creature was to be seen. Even the tame robin, which came to the window-sill every morning at breakfast-time for crumbs, was hidden up somewhere.

"I must tell somebody," she said. "Would it be very wicked, I wonder, to make up a doll? Would God strike me dead for breaking 'the Sabbath if I did? Oh, I *must* tell somebody."

She listened a moment, and now she heard Janet walking to and fro in her bedroom beneath, dressing herself for church in the afternoon, the snow having ceased falling. Hastily she snatched the cushion off the sofa, wrapped it up in a woollen antimacassar, and sat down with it in her lap.

"Oh, Helena Victoria Beatrice," she murmured, in the hushed tones of romance, being greatly enamoured of the royal princes and princesses at that time—the youngest of them in particular—

laying her cheek against the cushion, conscious that she was imperilling her soul in this make-believe. "My darling own father is going to be married again, and I am *not* glad. I *can't* be glad. Father is my sweetheart and I cannot give him up to any one else. He is *mine*, my very own, and it breaks my heart. He says I can go halves, but I *can't* go halves with any one."

She felt better after this outburst, and, hearing her father knocking the snow off his boots at the gate just then, hastily put away the make-believe doll and ran to greet him with a smiling, if flushed and guilty, face.

The longing for comfort and exchange of confidences overwhelmed her again in the afternoon, when she and her father were alone. She crept close up to him and laid her head on his arm, more than once, but he was writing, writing to the London lady all the time, hurrying to get his letter finished before the Dragon came home from her church, so that he need not meet her accusing eyes. He, too, was breaking the Sabbath writing letters.

Elspeth longed for her dolls and sighed wearily through the long, dreary afternoon. In the evening it was a little better, when she and her father

read the big Bible together and she had the pictures to look at. But he was firm in his refusal that night to bring out her mother's wedding-cake and have that little sacramental service. (Indeed, they never had it again in this world.) He also changed the subject whenever she began to talk about the London lady, with whom, to tell the truth, he was a little annoyed. He had been reading her long, much-crossed letter over again, and it had struck him as being slightly dictatorial in its tone.

"When I think of your little girl," it said, with many underlinings, "as *I* saw her that day, with her red shawl and *red* hair, a colour I have always *particularly disliked*, as in my experience of life I have always found it associated with a *very bad temper*," (poor, maligned, red heads!) "*her shocking manners* and her *deplorable* Scotch accent, I really feel that I cannot marry you. She looked such a *little barbarian*. But as for yourself you know that I——"

He smiled over the remainder of the sentence. The lady had been by no means easy to win. Perhaps that was part of the attraction to a man so much courted as he was. The unconscious child had been at one time an almost insurmount-

able barrier between them. A previous marriage was bad enough. But a child! The lady drew the line firmly at the child. However, he had conquered at last. His second wooing was crowned with success, after a long time of apparently fruitless effort on his part. The lady was quite within her rights in imposing conditions on him. It was a great honour that she should take him at all, for she was distinctly charming, and very clever and accomplished. He was, moreover, very much in love, so there was an end of it.

But did she, perhaps, think a little too much of appearances and the outside things of life? He was a simple-minded man himself and liked simplicity and naturalness before everything else. And was the child really so bad as all that? He had kept glancing at her from time to time while writing his reply, and he thought not. A little old-fashioned, perhaps. She was being brought up by old-fashioned people. Grandfather was old-fashioned. So was Janet. So was the Laird. So, perhaps, also, was he himself. But they had done their best.

And as for her hair, in his eyes it was beautiful, and to call it red was a libel. He had artis-

tic tastes, and it was the shade and colour artists raved over. Titian would have painted it. It had been the sun glinting on her mother's ringlets of burnished copper that had made him glance first at the gentle face framed by them. There was a tugging at his heart-strings as he thought of her, but he put the old memories hastily aside. Such thoughts were not for him now. But he wondered a little if he were doing right in his choice of a second mother for the child she had left behind in his care.

Already, without their knowing it, the graceful shadow of the London lady was gliding between them, and the dual life of father and child, with its touching devotion to each other, its pathetic love, born of loneliness and bereavement, was slipping away from them both down that swiftly flowing, restless stream which we call Life, never to return again.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAGNETISM OF HENDRY

IT was four days after Elspeth was burdened with the secret of her father's engagement to the London lady, and there was a young people's party at Freddy's old home, to which she had been invited.

During those four days Elspeth had been snowed up in the house alone with the Dragon, and although she had told all her dolls the wonderful secret, and the robin had listened to it on the window-sill, with his perky little head cocked on one side, no sympathetic human ear had heard it as yet. The London lady's name must not be mentioned, even indirectly, in Janet's hearing. Her father was very much engaged that week, and was even lunching in town on account of the bad weather. Except for a few minutes during his hurried breakfast Elspeth never saw him at all. So now she turned her thoughts in the direction of the party, where she hoped to meet some of her little girl friends,

to whom she could confide it in strictest secrecy.

Parties were not always nice. Often they were quite the reverse. Sometimes there were grumpy, taciturn, or terrifying fathers to be met. On those occasions how proud Elspeth was of her own handsome, genial one, who had once or twice come to take her home! Sometimes there were fidgety or critical mothers, who were always finding fault with their own children and looking askance at other people's. Sometimes the girls of the family were quarrelsome or jealous, and sometimes—oh, horror of horrors!—there were bullying big brothers to be encountered.

At Freddy's old home there were none of those uncomfortable things. The mother was gentle and sweet, the white-haired father was as genial and kind and handsome as Elspeth's own. The boys and girls had been brought up to think of others rather than themselves. Consequently, parties there were a source of unalloyed delight, and although all the family were much older than herself, a few choice little ones, who would have been Freddy's contemporaries had he lived, were always invited with the others.

Think, then, of Elspeth's disgust when she heard the Dragon say that Thursday morning to

her father, as he was putting on his coat in the hall,

"I am afraid Elspeth won't be able to go to the party to-night."

Her father, looking down, saw a flushed and eager little face, with a very anxious pair of brown eyes in it, fixed on him.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Why not?"

"The weather, sir, just look at it. And all the way to the other side of the Park! It is such a long way for her to walk. The snow is very deep in places, and I heard her sneezing in the night last night too. She'll catch her death of cold."

"Oh, I don't know," said the easy-going father again. "She is not made of salt or sugar to melt easily, are you, Elspeth? If she wants to go, and is well wrapped up, I don't think she would take any harm. Do you want to go, dear?"

"Oh, *yes*, father."

The Dragon compressed her thin lips. Would this irresponsible man never learn the value of the child's soul entrusted to him? Would he never understand that disappointments were good for her? That what she liked, or did not like, was but a bubble compared to her development.

THE MAGNETISM OF HENDRY 181

That the will *must* be broken in childhood or the heart will assuredly be broken in maturity. She said nothing, however, but was silent, with the stern silence of disapproval.

There was nothing for it after that but to get things ready. So, with much grumbling at having to go out herself with her charge in such bitter weather, she starched and ironed the little rough-dried white muslin party frock, and laid it with its sash of royal-blue, ready for use on the bed, and aired various dainty, lace-trimmed party garments at her kitchen fire.

Four o'clock in the afternoon saw them starting. Elspeth, muffled up to the eyes in shawls, her feet encased in thick knitted woollen stockings over her white open-worked evening ones, and strong laced boots, with india-rubber goloshes on the top of all.

The wind blew fiercely down the square. It had been thawing all day and the deep snow had turned into a sticky substance. The weather was full of vagaries, and now it was freezing hard again. What walking would be like later on nobody knew.

Elspeth's goloshes, bought with a careful and thrifty eye to futurity, were a size too large for

her, and were continually slipping off at the most inconvenient places, or whenever she tried to hurry. Once or twice one was left behind in a mountain of slush and had to be gone back for. The Dragon was in a very bad temper.

"I am sure you might feel when they come off. They are heavy enough," she said angrily, after going back the third time. Elspeth was very near tears. The multi-coloured tip of her nose felt frost-bitten even under her grey Shetland veil. Altogether it was a slow and rather sorrowful progress to the brilliantly-lighted house beyond the Park, and tea had already commenced when they arrived.

All troubles were forgotten, however, by Elspeth, after the Dragon had taken off her mummy-like wrappings, put on her evening shoes, and brushed her curls by a warm bedroom fire, and she went down to the happy party in the dining-room and saw the many smiling faces of her kind friends.

"Come away, come away. Better late than never," said Freddy's genial father. The mother smiled a gentle welcome, and made a place beside her at the table for the late-comer. Hendry, whom Elspeth had not seen for a year, as he was

THE MAGNETISM OF HENDRY 183

now away at boarding-school, ran round to her with cookies, pinching her cheek as he did so, looking tall and handsome in his evening suit, and the shy child soon forgot her shyness in the warm and cheerful atmosphere of this happy home.

The evening was well-advanced, and a game of "forfeits" was in progress, before Elspeth discovered that she had lost her pocket-handkerchief, and would have nothing to pay were she called upon to forfeit anything. She remembered that she had not had it since tea. So, during one of the pauses of the game, she slipped downstairs to look for it under the dining-room table.

The room was in semi-darkness, but she soon spied the little embroidered white square lying where she had dropped it at tea-time. As she picked it up, she heard a smothered laugh from a corner of the large room, and looking fearfully round, discovered a small group of boys who had slipped surreptitiously away from the girls' games going on in the drawing-room.

There was Hendry in the corner sitting on a form, with boys to right of him, and boys to left of him, doing sleight-of-hand tricks for their benefit. There was much laughing and whispering going on in the half-light of that merry corner.

Now what was it if it was not pure magnetism? Elspeth was naturally a very nervous and shy child. She was particularly afraid of the whole boy-species. And amongst this group of boys she saw the bullying big brother of one of her little friends—a boy who had once snatched the slender gold chain from her neck at a party, and snapped the ingenious wire fastening at the back. It was her mother's watch-chain, which the Dragon had wound several times round her neck, attached to the little locket with her mother's likeness in it. This bully had made ribald remarks and asked if it had come out of the pawnshop, and Elspeth had flown into a violent rage and stamped her foot at him, which had apparently greatly pleased him. Now, whenever he saw her alone, or met her on her way to school in the morning, he would come close up to her with the jibe "pawnshop," hissed hatefully in her ear as he passed, or make some unintelligible low remark from the other side of the road about donkeys liking carrots. Elspeth in her heart hated him so much she could have killed him.

Her enemy looked round now jeeringly, and she drew herself up with dignity and prepared

to leave the room. But Hendry also looked. The merry, twinkling hazel eyes said to her as plainly as words, "Come here, Elspeth, and sit on my knee and see me do my conjuring tricks. I will take care of you." And the mesmerism of those kind, laughing eyes went straight to her heart and ran down into her little bronze shoes, and, without stopping to think what she was doing, she ran quickly across the room, warily stepping over the big, clumsy foot which the Bully had stuck out for her to trip over. She was on Hendry's knee, within his warm, encircling arm, before you could look round. The Bully was quelled by the look of quiet power on Hendry's face and said nothing. Happy Elspeth, to have such a "very *parfait gentil* knight" as her protector. The influence which Hendry afterwards possessed over his fellow-men was there in embryo over his fellow-boys.

For some minutes she sat quietly watching his clever tricks. Then she suddenly became conscious of her secret. The intolerable burden of it had somewhat worn off during the excitement of the evening, and it had for a time passed out of her mind. She had as yet found no one with

whom to share it. It now flashed across her that here was a safe recipient. Hendry was true, and staunch, and loyal, a very prince amongst boys. She would share the mighty secret with Hendry.

She watched her opportunity, and one soon occurred. There was a pause in the tricks. The Bully's attention was temporarily engaged in cuffing the small boy next to him. Elspeth slipped a loving arm round Hendry's neck and whispered:

"Hendry."

He bent his head to listen, smiling at her.

"Well, what is it? Do you think you can do that trick?"

"Hendry, I have a secret to tell you."

Then he saw that it was something important.

"Well, what is it?" he whispered back.

"I want to tell you. My father is going to be married again."

Now he was surprised indeed.

"No!" he ejaculated.

"He is," said Elspeth, nodding her head. "He is, *truly*."

"Who told you?" asked Hendry.

"He told me his own self."

"Who to?" was the next whispered question.

THE MAGNETISM OF HENDRY 187

"To one of the London ladies."

"Never!" said Hendry, in such a tone of surprise that he nearly let Elspeth slip off his knee and had to gather her hurriedly on again.

"Which of them?"

"Miss Lilian. The one who sings, 'Will ye no come back again?' "

For that was what her father and Miss Lilian had sung together in her hearing.

"Well, I never!" whispered Hendry.

At this moment his mother appeared in the doorway.

"Boys!" she exclaimed, "how naughty of you to go away like that by yourselves. How very unchivalrous to go off and leave the girls to play alone! Hendry, I am surprised at you. Go all of you upstairs at once and join in the girls' games. And you, Elspeth, dear, what are you doing down here?"

"I came for my handkerchief," she replied, holding it out, "and I stayed."

"Come away, then, with me," said the lady. "Now, boys, off you go at once."

The boys tumbled upstairs laughing, a rough-and-tumble mass of humanity, Elspeth and the hostess following.

No one noticed that Hendry had quietly detached himself from the group, and that when they all entered the drawing-room he was not amongst them.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SORROWFUL WAY

FOR what followed Elspeth never blamed Hendry. Not even when the fate of the revealer of secrets befell her, when the sun was darkened and the moon ceased to give light, when even the stars themselves ceased to twinkle, as she bewailed her sins in the black darkness of the coal-cellar, trembling with fear at Willie Windy howling round the house for his little wife. For Jane's ventriloquism had been well done, and to Elspeth Willie Windy was a real personage, a very living and real terror, and there was no one to undeceive her. Besides, in the coal-cellar, there was nothing to hinder him from flying down the grating and going off with her bodily.

She never blamed Hendry. He was not to know the weight of her mighty secret, and that he alone out of a crowd had been chosen to share it. Probably in the short course of the interrupted whisper he had not even understood that

it was a secret at all. Certainly he did not know that it was a burden which had been carried for days awaiting a trustworthy confidant. Still less did he dream of the consequences to her of his repeating what she had told him.

It was the simplest thing in the world. Fate has often hung upon a thread. This time she hung upon a button.

When Hendry left the other boys he bounded upstairs to the nursery. The comfortable, motherly nurse, who had been a second mother to all the family, sat in an easy chair by the fire sewing, an open work-basket on the table beside her well supplied with needles threaded ready with cotton. For it was a time of girls' flimsy evening frocks. Tullies and tarlatans and gauzes tore if you so much as looked at them sometimes, and all knew that nurse waited with nimble fingers in the nursery, ready to repair rents, or gathers, torn in play as soon as they occurred.

Hendry now held out a shirt-cuff with a button hanging by a thread.

"Ah, Master Hendry! Conjuring again, I can see."

"Yes," he replied.

"Do you know," he asked carelessly, while the

nurse stitched the button on, "Elspeth Arnot says her father is going to marry Miss Lilian Carew?"

"Is he?" said the nurse, with much interest; for the London ladies had been staying as guests in that very house (although Elspeth did not know it), and it was there that her father's courtship had been carried on. There had been a good deal of talk and surmise about it in the servants' hall, and much wondering as to whether anything would come of it.

"Is he? Well, I am not surprised. He came here a great deal when they stayed here. Who did you say told you, Master Hendry?"

"Elspeth told me just now. She said her father told her himself."

"Oh, then it must be all settled," said the nurse. "I must ask Janet when she comes to-night how she likes that idea. It will make a great difference to her, I should think. Any more loose buttons, Master Hendry?"

"No, thanks," said Hendry, hurrying off. Nothing could have been simpler.

When Janet came for Elspeth that evening the nurse and she had a long private conversation in the nursery together, and it was late before the child was summoned from the drawing-

room. She trotted upstairs gleefully, her hands full of bon-bons, and miscellaneous treasures out of crackers, to show Janet. On her head was a pink paper cap, and she was flushed and excited with the happy time she had been having. It had been a delightful evening all through. She had rolled her burden on the sympathetic Hendry, and felt correspondingly light of heart.

But at the first sight of the Dragon's face her own fell. It was white, set, and terrible, the thin lips drawn to a mere line. Not a word was said. Janet snatched the treasures out of the child's hands, and the cap off her head, and threw them on the dressing-table. Then she muffled her up quickly in her shawls and wrappings, tying on the capacious goloshes firmly this time with string brought with her in her pocket.

"You have tied them too tight, they hurt me," whispered Elspeth.

"They are nothing of the kind," said the Dragon. Not another word passed between them.

In absolute silence they went through the hall, grimly passing the line of maids sitting waiting for their charges. In silence they trod the crunching snow, down the carriage-drive, out into

the road. They turned to the right, a different direction to that by which they had come, and Elspeth ventured to remonstrate.

"Oh, why are we going such a long, round-about way home on such a cold night?"

"That is my business," was the stern reply.

What was going to happen? They walked on rapidly. To Elspeth it almost seemed as if they flew, so quickly did they get over the ground. They went out of their way to reach the terrace where her grandfather lived, and stopped opposite his house. Elspeth was panting breathlessly between fear and haste. She was absolutely ignorant of any cause of offence. What had she been doing? There is something horribly appalling about the unknown.

A bright light was burning in her grandfather's bedroom upstairs. It shone cheerfully through the buff linen blind of his window. The Elder was going to his peaceful bed. He was punctuality and method itself, and the town clock struck ten as the two figures stood silently in the snow outside. Two loose teeth awaiting the Dragon's rough dentistry chattered in Elspeth's head.

As they looked, the Elder's shadow crossed

the blind. He came over close to the window and stood there winding up his watch. His slim, erect figure was silhouetted against the bright yellow background, every line of it perfect, his straight, clear-cut features, framed with his abundant hair, showing up as if they had been cut out of black paper.

"Do you see your grandfather?" asked the Dragon in an awful whisper.

"Ye-es," said the child, trembling.

"He thinks the whole world of you," hissed the Dragon. "You are the very apple of his eye. You little deceiver! I wonder you are not killed this moment at his railings like Ananias and Sapphira. *Their* lives were not as bad as yours."

The Elder moved away from the window just then, and the sense of his nearness and protecting presence, if she screamed very loud, forsook the child and she shivered with terror.

"Take that—and that—and that," said the Dragon. "That" meant blows on the victim's back. They sounded very loud, but they did not hurt much, for they fell on many woollen wrappings, till a crowning one came and she went down amongst the snow like a ninepin.

It was the most exquisite refinement of cruelty to chastise her thus in front of her grandfather's house, with her protector so near and yet so far away.

Look out, quickly, grandfather, and see the helpless child of your old age, the apple of your eye, lying prostrate in the snow in front of your window this bitter night!

She was not there long though. The Dragon dragged her up again hastily before she had time to cry out, and shook her roughly, balancing her on the slippery goloshes.

"I've a good mind to leave you in the street all night. You wicked, untruthful child!" she said.

"I wish you would," wailed Elspeth, "and then grandpapa would take me in."

The Dragon hurried her quickly past the house at that. The Elder's hearing was quick. He would recognise the child's voice at once, and come out if she cried out loud.

A policeman passed them on his beat. Some vague thoughts of appealing to him passed through Elspeth's mind. But he never looked at her.

"It's a fine clear nicht," he remarked in suave tones to the Dragon. "Freezin' hard again."

"It is that," she replied as blandly.

They walked on till they reached a corner of waste ground at the end of the terrace. Here some ancient corporation, with vague dreams of beauty in its heart, had planted grass and shrubs and erected a fountain in the middle. The nude figure of a little child, blackened with age, stood on a pedestal, tipping up a pitcher, through one generation to another. The fountain, of which it was the crowning ornament, was somewhat erratic in its performances, and who turned on its water supply or who turned it off, or whether it was automatic, nobody seemed to know. It played sometimes for weeks at a time, then stopped suddenly for months. It had been playing for some obscure reason when the Frost King descended upon it and bound it fast in his chains of ice. The little black figure stood now, pathetic in its nakedness and loneliness, fringed with mighty icicles, with icicles dropping from its pitcher.

Elsbeth had always felt a strange sympathy for this childish statue. When she was very little she had wanted to bring some of her warm

clothes to put on it. She thought of it often on cold nights in the winter. So now she felt she had a silent companion in her cold and misery. The Dragon stopped by the frozen fountain and began again.

"The wickedest, story-telling girl that ever lived. That's what you are. A hypocrite. A whited sepulchre, full of rottenness and dead men's bones within. You *pretend* to be so good, with your innocent looks, to your father and grandfather. They don't know you. You little——" she paused to find the most expressive word in her vocabulary, then hissed it out between her teeth—"you little *cutty*!"

Elspeth here plucked up a little courage, helped by that silent, ice-bound, childish figure, which was at once so much worse off than herself.

"I have been a good girl this week. You said so yourself," she said, between her piteous sobs. "I don't know why you are scolding me. If it is the loaf-sugar that's gone again I wish you'd ask father about it. He will tell you I've had none. He says he buys the sugar—and he'll take it if he likes—in spite of anybody."

She was tale-bearing again about her father to excuse herself. The Dragon slapped her

harder than ever. It penetrated this time to the bare shoulders under her woollen wrappings.

"You know very well it is not sugar I am speaking about," she said. "I forbade you ever to mention those London ladies' names again, and you go straight to this party, the very first chance you have, and tell *Hendry*, Hendry who is a *boy*! I wonder you didn't think shame to be so forward as to tell a *boy* such a thing—that your father is going to marry one of them! And it'll be all through the town to-morrow, and in the papers on Saturday. Such a wicked, wicked lie! As if your father would look at one of them after the mother you had. You'll come to the gallows before you've done."

"But father——" began Elspeth.

"Be quiet now immediately, and don't tell me any more of your lies, but walk home in front of me. You'll never see your mother again, *that* I know. When you get to the next world the door of Heaven will be slammed close shut in your face!"

This was the culminating and most terrible prophecy, which generally broke Elspeth's heart and haunted her dreams for nights. But some-

how to-night, as she walked the rest of her sorrowful way home, weeping quietly in anticipation of what was sure to come, dragging her heavy goloshed feet through the snow, so conscious was she of absolute innocence that it had little or no effect. Even the stars seemed to wink kindly down upon her, as if to say that beyond them, where her mother dwelt, there was only peace and love, and little children were never misunderstood, as they so often were in this weary world down below.

The Dragon was one of those people who, even in a walk with a confidential friend, had to keep stopping to talk every now and then, as if the mere act of locomotion impeded her flow of language. But she never stopped now till they reached their own house, walking the rest of the way in a silence that could be felt, and was very uncomfortable to feel. Then she propped Elspeth, who was by this time very tired, up against one stone pillar of the gate, and leant against the other herself for further parley. The house was in semi-darkness, her master not having yet returned home.

‘Now, before you go in, you’ve got to say

you're sorry for telling such lies," she said, returning to the charge; "or else you'll stay out here all night."

Elspeth sighed wearily. She was too tired to care what happened to her. The secret was out now anyway. Her father was better able to protect himself than she was.

Suddenly and unexpectedly she turned at bay, and her quivering childish mouth took on a strange resemblance to her grandfather's firm one.

"I am *not* sorry," she said boldly. "I am not sorry one single bit. I haven't told any lies. Father told me himself, and he said I wasn't to tell you. You may kill me if you like," she added, with sublime indifference, leaning up against the pillar.

But this was a new aspect of the affair. Could there possibly be some truth in it after all? The Dragon was nonplussed. That her suspicions had been aroused previously, was evident by the jealousy with which she had received any mention of the London ladies' names. She called to mind that lately her master had been behaving uncommonly like an accepted lover—whistling and singing Jacobite songs about the quiet house like a happy-hearted boy. He was still young and was

now evidently getting over his grief, which had been very deep and sincere while it lasted.

The Dragon said no more, but walked thoughtfully up the steps, inserted her latch-key in the door, and, pushing the child before her, entered the hall, still thinking.

"Now go downstairs," she said sharply, "while I see to the fires up here. And take off your wraps, and I'll come down and give you the biggest thrashing you have ever had in your life. You deserve it. You won't forget this one in a hurry."

Elspeth walked slowly and sorrowfully along the hall, with eyes half-blind with weeping. There was no escape. Janet's word was as the laws of the Medes and Persians. She always kept it. If she could only run away to her grandfather! But the back door was locked and bolted she knew. It always was at nights, and she could not reach the top bolt. So that was no use.

The back stairs were very dark and crooked, with an awkward bend to them. Elspeth had had more than one bad fall there, and her father had a thick rope fixed up for her to hold on by, as there was no railing. She held on to the rope

now by sheer force of habit, for she would have been glad to have gone down head first, with the natural speed of gravitation, right from the top to the bottom, and there would have been an end of her. She kicked one foot sullenly behind the other and walked as slowly as possible.

At the crooked and dangerous bend the string which tied on a golosh came undone and it slipped off. And there in the dark corner, in her fatigue, and despair, and helplessness, the tempter met her.

Hitherto she had been blamed unjustly. She would now deserve the punishment which was surely coming. She would leave the golosh lying there, and Janet, who never held on by the ropes, would fall over it, and rumbling down to the bottom of the stairs would break her neck. She (Elspeth) would be hanged for it. But that was a mere detail.

Another thought also struck her, and on the spur of it she raced down the rest of the stairs with speed. The bedroom which she shared (except on Saturday nights) with Janet, was a large sunny room in the front of the house, facing the square. It was the breakfast-room of the house, really, and was only a semi-basement.

Here, in a large cupboard, Elspeth kept her toys and played by herself when it was not too cold, and here also she slept. It served as day and night nursery combined. It was exactly opposite the stairs. The gas—a naked light—was burning there now dimly. The bracket had flexible joints, it was bent over to the looking-glass, where Janet had serenely put on her bonnet before going out, and was well within Elspeth's reach.

Speedily she disrobed, dashing off shawls and mufflers. Then with three mighty puffs she blew out the gas, and in her low-necked muslin frock crawled under Janet's bed, and up into its farthest away corner. She was absolutely safe there, she knew. It was an old-fashioned wooden double bedstead, very narrow underneath, and no grown-up person could ever get under it. It was fixed up against the wall and was very heavy to move. Unless her father helped Janet to move it she might stay there all night if she liked.

It was bitterly cold. There was no fire in the room. Janet would not allow that, for she believed in making children hardy. The icy wind blew up from the cracks in the floor, which was uncarpeted under the bed. There was dust, and cobwebs, where Janet's broom could not reach to

sweep. It was hardly the place for a scanty muslin, low-necked, short-sleeved evening frock on a bitter night in January. But Elspeth knew she was safe from pursuit. She held the key of the position in her own small hands.

CHAPTER XIV

LIKE AS A FATHER

JANET was a long time upstairs in the dining-room and her master's bedroom. She had been away for two or three hours, and the fires were nearly out and were tiresome to burn. It was some time before she could leave them to go to the shivering culprit below. As she went down the back stairs she was assailed by a strong smell of escaping gas.

"What have you been doing, you bad child!" she cried, running down swiftly, neatly missing the golosh.

Then the window had to be opened to let the smell out, and in the darkness Janet, fumbling for the bracket to turn the gas off, knocked her head sharply against it. Elspeth laughed hysterically under the bed. She was thoroughly naughty now and utterly regardless of consequences.

In vain, when Janet discovered her whereabouts, did she order her to come out, issuing

imperative commands, entreaties, threats, by turns. Elspeth remained there, sullen and immovable. If she froze to death, which seemed quite likely, there she would stay till they found her skeleton. Janet's temper waxed furious. She fetched a broom and gave several smart cracks with it in the far corner. Elspeth lay face downwards, laughing and crying alternately when she found she was beyond reach.

At last the enemy was worsted and had no alternative but to surrender.

"Stay, then, where you are," Janet cried, "till your father comes home, if it should be till midnight. His hands are stronger and heavier than mine. What he'll do to you I dare not think. I would not trust myself now to whip you. I am too angry."

She went off into the kitchen as she spoke, and Elspeth lay still, sobbing and shivering, till she heard her father's step in the hall. Janet went up to meet him. There was a long conversation in the room overhead. The voices rose and fell, now low, now loud. Elspeth heard her father pacing about the room. It almost seemed as if he were remonstrating with Janet for giving him some task to do to which he objected.

"Where is she?" she heard him ask at length.

Presently she heard a loud noise on the stairs—rumble-tumble, rumble-tumble—as if a heavy body were being suddenly precipitated to the bottom. It was her father tumbling over the golosh! She had killed him instead of Janet! Her kind, indulgent father! She put her fingers into her ears so that she should not hear the rest. It was not until he looked under the bed that she knew nothing serious had happened.

"Come out now, Elspeth, at once, and no nonsense," he said gravely, in the quiet tone of one accustomed to being obeyed.

But for the first time in her life Elspeth did not obey that beloved voice.

Janet leant against the rail at the foot of the bed, her face white with concentrated passion. Her master glanced at her and took in the situation at once. He saw that it was a battle royal of wills and that neither of the combatants would surrender.

"I think, Janet," he said quietly, "if I am to manage her, you had better go away. I can do it better alone. You can go and make me some coffee. I am tired and hungry. I have had a long, hard day's work, and have not eaten any-

thing since midday. Go away, now, if you please, and leave me to manage her by myself."

So Janet withdrew, and he waited till he heard her busy in the kitchen. She would disapprove of his methods, he knew. There was dead silence under the bed.

"Now, Elspeth," he said sorrowfully, "you're a very naughty little girl, I hear. I want you to come out at once. Father is very tired and very cold. He has had a long drive from the country to-night, and you will be kind to him, I know. You know he won't whip his own only little girl, so you can come out. He wants her to explain to him what all this rumpus has been about."

He waited patiently, and presently he heard her shuffling nearer—a little nearer still—then she peeped out from under the bed to see how the land lay.

"Come away now, darling," he said.

After some more delay, she came out, a miserable and melancholy little object in her muslin frock, all bedraggled with melted snow from the golosh which had stayed on, festooned with cobwebs, and covered with dust. Her sash of royal-blue was crumpled and twisted round to the front;

her white, tear-stained face was pitiable in its abject misery. She who had gone forth so bravely to her party!

But there was dignity in every line of the erect, diminutive figure. Her spirit was not yet broken. Her father's lips twitched under his moustache in spite of himself.

He held out his hand, and she took it with slow and dignified deliberation. They looked at each other gravely, as if taking each other's measure. There was silence between them for a minute or two. Then, at last, her dignity broke down, and, sobbing, she asked a foolish question.

"Are you killed, father?"

It was absurd, seeing him there in the flesh, and he laughed. He was rather glad to get an opportunity of laughing out loud.

"Killed! No. Why should I be killed?"

"Are you hurt?"

"No, I am not hurt. I slipped on the stairs, that is all. Janet should be more careful and not leave things lying about in that dark corner."

Elsbeth looked at him. In spite of being swollen with tears, her eyes grew round and big at the thought of what might have been. But she was no moral coward to let the weight of

blame for her misdeeds fall upon any one else. Not so had she been brought up.

"I left it lying there," she said slowly. "It wasn't Janet."

"You! Why?"

"For Janet—to—to—fall over. I wanted to—murder—her," she wailed, and flung herself into her father's arms. He gathered her up in them and held her frozen hands tightly in his own.

"Now tell me," he said gravely, "from the beginning, all about this. It is no use your setting your will in opposition to Janet's, you know, for she'll master you. You'll get the worst of it, however hard you try. You may as well understand that to commence with."

With many sobbing interruptions, and much coaxing, she told her long and sorrowful story, gathering confidence to explain some of the feelings bottled up in her heart as she went along. The father got a glimpse then into depths he had never guessed at, so uncommonly like his own that more than once he smiled over the childish confidences. For it had been a difficulty in keeping his own secret that had made him share it with

her in the first place—a most foolish and unwise proceeding altogether.

He drew the rug off her crib beside him and wrapped the shivering little mortal in it, listening to her story with a tenderness born of much sympathy and understanding on his part.

“And, O father,” wound up Elspeth, “please do let me be your little companion again. But don’t—don’t—tell me any more secrets, for I *can’t* keep them, you see. I was afraid I couldn’t. It was such a big secret for a little girl like me, and I *had* to tell somebody. And now I’ve broken my word, and grandpapa says that’s a very bad sign of anybody. But you never told me not to tell Hendry, did you? And I didn’t tell Janet till she knew.”

“I never thought of him,” said her father simply. “Indeed, I didn’t know you knew him well enough to tell him anything. And he is a big boy. I thought you were so dreadfully afraid of big boys.”

“Not of *Hendry*, father.”

“Well, we’ll say no more about it now. Shall father undress you and sit with you till you go to sleep? and then you and Janet, as you’ve had

such a terrific big quarrel, needn't see each other again to-night."

"Oh, *please*."

He undressed her with tenderness, as he had often done before on Sunday nights, when she was too little, or too sleepy, to wait till Janet came home. The excitement was over now and she was quite worn out with the stress of her emotions. He wiped her tear-stained face with his pocket-handkerchief, and gently picked some cobwebs off her hair, and he tucked her up in her own little crib as tenderly as any mother. The clock struck the hour of midnight as he did so.

Her sleepy face looked up at him from the pillow, all aglow with responsive love and gratitude, as with quivering lips she murmured:

"My prayers. You've forgiven me. May I say them to you, dear father, now?"

"Surely—surely."

He did not know that this was Janet's crown and climax of punishment, to refuse to let her say her prayers, and to send the child, sorrowful and unshriven, into unhallowed sleep. It was on those occasions that the door of Heaven was slammed in her face, and she heard the terri-

ble cry "Too late!" echoing through the night.

She murmured the infant's committal hymn aloud:—

"I lay my body down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take."

Her voice grew fainter, and it was in a very sleepy tone that she began the enumeration of her beloved ones. "Bless father, grandfather, the Laird, and Janet, and make little Elspeth——" Here the voice trailed away into silence. She was asleep.

"Well, that's quick work," said her father, after waiting a few minutes to hear if the sleepy voice resumed its orisons again. "She must have been thoroughly tired out. But what in the world possessed her to tell the lad Hendry, I wonder?" he added musingly, as he gently withdrew his hand from hers.

Half an hour later Janet stood, shading a candle with her hand, looking at the sleeping child. A quivering sob passed over the little frame as Janet stood there. The storm had spent itself, but as the thunder rumbles away among the mountains long after the sky has cleared, so

Elspeth's memory of her Via Dolorosa haunted her even in her dreams.

She was small for her age, and for the first time Janet seemed to see traces of inherent delicacy in the dark violet shadows under her eyes, and the blue veins shining through the white skin. Her heart softened as she looked.

"Poor wee thing!" she said to herself. "Perhaps her grandfather is right when he says I am too severe with her. And I'm beginning to wonder if there has maybe been some truth in what she has been saying after all. Her father looked uncommonly sheepish when I told him about it. I don't know if he whipped her or not, but I will not say anything more about it to her to-morrow. I will just put her in the coal-cellar for tale-bearing, for she must be stopped at that—that is, unless she has got her death of cold to-night, which I think is very likely."

Here Janet lifted up the crumpled blue sash from where her master had put the boots on the top of it, shook it out carefully, and moved her candle farther away so that its rays should not disturb the sleeper.

"And if her father is really going to marry a butterfly of a lady like one of these London ones,"

continued she, "then all the more reason why I should make the most of my time while I am here, in training her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, so that she may never forget. She won't get much of it afterwards, or I'm cheated. But what in the world made her tell that boy Hendry is what gets over me, and her ordinarily so shy with boys."

So both master and maid wondered the same thing in almost identical words. But neither of them ever thought a word about personal magnetism, or that would have explained everything.

And there let me say, as the figure of Janet passes across these pages, that if I have failed to depict her as she really was, a good woman and true, of sterling principles, with high ideals of duty and religion, I have failed indeed.

Of the blood of the martyrs was Janet. Fit mate for one of those brave men of the moss-hags, who skulked in caves and holes of the earth, or left their bones bleaching in the dungeons of the Bass, laying down their lives triumphantly for God and the Covenant. Unfortunately, she was born a couple of centuries too late, and, living in the palmy, easy-going days of Queen Victoria, had not their glorious opportunities of testi-

fyng. But that ancestor of hers who received the crown of martyrdom, whose name is writ large in the roll of the noble army of martyrs in Edinburgh, had no more leal and true follower of the principles for which he laid down his life, than this humble working housekeeper, who was his direct descendant, and earned her daily bread by the honest sweat of her brow in the commonplace ruts of quiet life.

She, too, would have gladly hailed such an opportunity of laying down her life for her principles as he did, had she lived in more strenuous and stirring times.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE GLOAMING

SHADOWS lay over the grey house in the square, the shadows of coming events. At the door Fate sat spinning. When she saw the Dragon go out, she shook her head slowly and sadly. When she saw Elspeth come bounding in, swinging her bag of school-books, she smiled a little wistfully. Perhaps she herself had been a child once and knew how swiftly childhood passes away. When she saw grandfather, the Elder, toiling up the steep walk which wound amongst the trees for his daily constitutional, with his hand behind his back to act as a propeller in his ascent, she had tears in her eyes. But when she looked at Elspeth's father, and saw the worried, preoccupied look on his handsome face, she laughed, and holding up her distaff laughed again behind it.

"The Elder was up in the cemetery yesterday," whispered the Dragon's widowed sister one Sabbath, when she had come to tea.

"Never!" said the Dragon, with a start of

such surprise that the toast on her toasting-fork fell into the ash-pan.

"He was. I saw him."

"He's never been there since Mistress Arnot was buried. Are you quite sure it was him?"

"Ay, I'm sure," said the widow. "I bought two roots of pink double daisies at the door in the forenoon. They were real fine roots. I paid tuppence each for them. And I took them up to the cemetery in the aifternoon, and I was plantin' them on the gudeman's grave, when I h'ard a quick, shairp step ahint me—my! but he's soople on his feet, that auld man—and there was the Elder. And he walkit ower to Mistress Arnot's grave and stood there a while. Then he stoopit down and pookit up some weeds——"

"Weeds!" interrupted the tidy Dragon, and nearly dropped the toast again. "Is it untidy? Elspeth and me haven't been up there for three weeks."

"Oh, no, it's no' to say untidy. There's wall-flowers out and white lilies—real bonny—and I saw nae weeds. But the Elder pookit twa, three—bits o' gress, I'm thinkin'—and flung them ower the wall. Then he went away, walkin' very shairp."

"Wonders'll never cease," said the Dragon.
"I wonder what took him up there."

But the Dragon herself had some mystery about her, for sometimes she sighed, and once or twice Elspeth saw tears in her eyes. She sewed everlastingly at white seam.

"But, Janet," remonstrated Elspeth, "I had three quite new white petticoats with a lot of tucks in them last year, and you're making me three more. And grandpapa says I haven't grown a quarter of an inch since last year, for he measures me on the door. He thinks I'm going to be a dwarf, like Kitty Wake."

"It's best to have half a dozen of everything," said the Dragon. "You never know what's going to happen." Then she added in a vicious undertone, breaking her thread with a snap as she did so; "She shall see I know how to sew, at any rate, and how children's clothes should be made."

When the light failed for white seam, the Dragon crocheted tuckers, neat tuckers stitched on white tape, a whole cardboard box full of them, and explained how it was easiest for small fingers to sew them on frocks.

"But, Janet," queried Elspeth, "if I have three for my everyday frocks, and three for Sundays,

I don't need any more, do I, when Auntie Rosie washes them every fortnight?"

"Auntie Rosie won't always wash them every fortnight."

"Who will, then?"

"They'll perhaps go to a laundry," said Janet mysteriously. She pronounced it "landry."

"What is a 'landry'?" promptly asked Elspeth.

"Wait and see," said the Dragon. That horrid answer to stay the insatiable thirst for knowledge in youth, lately revived by an eminent personage. Surely he must have had it said to him in his nursery days and have taken that opportunity of retaliating on his fellow-countrymen.

"But, Janet——" persisted the querist.

The Dragon here fixed her with her eye.

"Now then! how often have I told you to ask no questions and you'll be told no lies."

No more was to be gathered from that quarter.

Grandfather, too, was somewhat mysterious. He drew the child close to him very often when she went to see him, and sometimes smoothed back her curls from her forehead with a very gentle old hand.

"You are getting rather like your grand-

mother," he said softly; "but with a difference, for you are like your father too. You have her brow. A fine, broad brow. There ought to be something behind it. You must be very diligent indeed with your lessons."

"I am," said Elspeth. "I have kept top for a fortnight. I went bottom yesterday, though," she added, as an afterthought.

"What for?" asked grandfather.

"For giggling. Oh, it was funny. We all said that Miss Maria's curls at the back of her head were false, and Nellie Anderson said if ever she got the pointer in her hand when Miss Maria was tying up the map, she would feel with it and see. And she did it yesterday. And Miss Maria turned round her head quickly to see who it was, and the pointer caught in them, and the curls came all off in a bunch, with a big comb, and the black lace cap she always wears, fastened on to them. And they all fell right down on to the floor in a big bunch. And I laughed out loud. I couldn't help it."

"That was a very rude girl," said grandfather severely.

"Oh, but, grandpapa, you would have laughed

yourself if you had seen it. Father laughed out loud when I told him this morning. Miss Maria looked so funny. She's got grey hair underneath, just a little screwed-up wee wisp. And she's quite bald on the top."

"Well, it was very rude, all the same," repeated grandfather. "I am surprised at you that you didn't know how to behave better than that."

Elsbeth hastily changed the subject.

"Grandpapa, why am I not going to the Laird's this summer?" she asked.

"You must ask your father that question, not me," he replied.

"But father won't tell me. He just says we are going to the seaside instead. And the seaside isn't half so nice as going to the Laird's. I just hate bathing when Janet puts me over the head."

"No," said grandfather, "I agree with you. It isn't nearly so nice as the Laird's."

He got up and walked over to the window as he spoke, and looked out on his little garden patch, now bursting into bloom with its sweet, old-fashioned flowers.

"'And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden,'" he said softly to himself: "'and

there he put the man whom he had formed . . . to dress it and to keep it.' ” He paused a moment or two, and then went on: “ ‘And the Lord God drove the man . . . out of the garden.’ ”

“There was a woman too,” chimed in Elspeth, who was listening intently, in the hope of catching some fragment of a solution to the mystery, as she often did in her father’s monologues. “There was a woman too,” she repeated, for her grandfather did not appear to be listening to her.

“In this case there was only a man,” he replied.

“Grandpapa!” ejaculated Elspeth, “where was Eve then? Adam was married when he was turned out of Eden.”

“In this case Adam was an old bachelor,” said her grandfather, so seriously that Elspeth asked no more.

She grew tired at last of worrying her mysterious relatives, and devoted herself instead to her dolls, crooning over them, mothering them, flying into rages and slapping them, after the manner of the Dragon herself. Then, after praying earnestly with the delinquents that they might have new hearts given to them, hearts of flesh instead

of stone, making them sit down and learn texts out of the Proverbs as she had to do so often herself.

But indeed it was over the Laird's home that the mystery and trouble lay. The long shadows reached the grey town, but it was in the heart of the beautiful country that the crucible was burning, purging and purifying the soul of the silver-haired Laird, and breaking his heart in the process.

It was through no fault of his own. He was one of the simplest and most economical of men, with not a single ambitious or extravagant taste belonging to him. But his estate had been heavily mortgaged by his father when he inherited it, and he knew it. He was, unfortunately, no farmer, and the land needed skilled farming to make it pay. He was, withal, so simple and child-like, so unbusiness-like and utterly impractical, living centuries back in his study amongst his books, that he did not even seem to realise his position until the inevitable happened. Then he had to sell the house of his fathers to pay debts that were none of his making, and his own heart had to be fused in the process.

It was the last night of May, 18—. The Laird had spent the day in his shirt-sleeves in his study,

and the result of his labours was apparent. Three huge packing-cases were filled with books. The dead languages were in one, modern languages in another, classics in the third. They had all been bought secondhand. He had never been rich enough to buy new books. Two more cases yawned empty, waiting for the miscellaneous assortment on the study shelves; the novels of Scott, Fenimore Cooper, Smollett, Fielding, and Richardson, books of Theology, Logic, Chemistry, and all Hugh Miller's geological books. The Laird was a voluminous reader of wide culture and broad views. All sort of authors, ancient and modern, crowded his shelves, the silent servants of his many solitary hours.

He was tired of stooping, and, standing up straight to stretch his long back, he caught sight of the sun setting, a red globe of fire, behind the long range of serrated peaks which were visible from his windows. It called to him to go out and watch it, as it had done any time for the last sixty years. To him the voice of Nature was the Voice of God.

He washed his dusty hands in the little washstand which stood in the cupboard of his study, and put on his coat. The instincts of the old

bachelor—his “pernickety ways,” as the Dragon called them—made him brush it carefully before he put it on to go and look at the sunset, and he rumbled up his snow-white curls with both his hands. Then he went out and stood in the porch, a fine, stalwart figure of a man.

Long years before, an eminent sculptor had asked permission to model the old Laird’s, his father’s, magnificent limbs for a celebrated statue of Adam. The son inherited his father’s splendid health and magnificent physique.

He stood now, tall and stately, with the young fresh tendrils of the honeysuckle climbing over the trellis-work of the porch above his head. Before it flowered the old place would know him no more. The man’s heart was very full.

It was a sunset of strange tints that evening. A background of clouds of deep violet tipped with crimson. The sky, of the very palest blue, had been turned by the brightness of the sun into a lake of silver, in which floated small, fleecy cloudlets of brilliant rose-pink, like islets floating in a crystal sea. The rays of the sun behind the purple clouds threw out long shafts of dazzling brightness, which tipped the dark background with silver, as the sun kisses the petals of

a daisy. Every peak in the long range of mountains on the west was rose-tipped, but the highest of them all towered clear and cone-shaped in the distance, glistening in a shimmering mantle of silver and pale blue, as if the sky had wrapped it round in its own cerulean colour.

The beautiful tints sank into the Laird's heart, and set it throbbing and pulsing wildly against his destiny. He was a child of the mountains, poetic and dreamy. Spirits are not finely touched but to fine issues, and such see God in every flower that blooms and every leaf which rustles and whispers overhead. The Spirit of the Mountains spoke to the Laird's soul now in the glory of the setting sun.

He reached his hand out for his hat, hanging on a peg in the hall. He must go out into that fresh, sweet-scented, rose-tinted air while the afterglow lasted. He must walk round the old place once more.

He paused at the sweet-brier hedge which bordered the garden and looked over it. Every spot was associated with his life. The old pear-tree, with its gnarled and twisted branches, each one bearing a different kind of fruit—he had himself, as a boy, superintended their grafting into

the original stock—was now a mass of blossoms. The apple and plum-trees were flaunting in their spring robes of beauty. In the shady corner was a bed of lilies-of-the-valley, and at his feet violets, white and blue, lurked like weeds in every corner, springing up even on the flagged path, filling the air with their fragrance.

Was it in the spring of the year, I wonder, when Adam and Eve were turned out of Eden?

The Laird walked up and down the grassy paths slowly, with his hands behind his back, drinking in the pure sweetness of the air, and the smell of the fresh earth with the vigorous spring growth going on within it. He paused again at the bottom of the slope to look over the fields—his fields—and gazed over the rich pasture land. If he had only been a better farmer!

Just so had they looked when he came home every year from college in the spring. Just where he stood, his mother used to stand and wave her hand to him, as he turned the corner in his father's gig. Just so had they looked when, on one never-to-be-forgotten evening, he had wandered out, and standing on lower ground behind the untrimmed hedge had heard—what he

was not meant to hear. The soft, low laugh of a girl, the deep, pleading tones of a man.

"You did not think," said the girl, "that I cared for your brother, did you? Why, it was always you, Robin Adair."

Then she laughed, a long, low ripple of happy girlish laughter, as at some old joke between them.

The man outside the hedge moved softly away. No one ever knew that he had heard a word, but the current of his life changed with a rush from that hour.

The old man glanced now at the nugget ring on his left hand. It was a keepsake from them both. They had gone to Australia, these two, his younger brother and the pretty orphan girl-cousin whom both brothers had loved, and they had died there within a few months of each other. Their boy—Elsbeth's father—had come home to his uncle and had been brought up here in the old place.

Gladly would he have averted this catastrophe. But the Laird was proud, and perhaps even a little obdurate in his sacrifice for principle. He would pay his debts himself. He would incur no fresh ones. And, after all, what did he need? A

place whereon to lay his head. A few shelves on which to put his books. He would have enough and to spare for all that when everything was paid in full. And the house had always been too big for him. The farm had only been a great worry and anxiety. He was a student and no farmer. He was as strong and as young as ever, he assured those who would only too gladly have extended a helping hand. So they were overruled.

The Laird walked slowly through the radiant garden, where all Nature was smiling on her silver-haired child. Past the kitchen window, where Mistress Kate, her face pale and her eyes red with weeping, sat putting a few stitches in the gown she was going away in on the morrow, and on into the summer-house. By the mere force of habit he raised his hand above his head and felt beneath the heather thatch. A wren flew out and then another. Yes, the wrens had built here again this year. How many generations of wrens? It was sixty years since he had found the first nest there, and during the generations the birds had grown very tame. Did they hand down a tradition, from one generation to another, that a gentle boy and man owned this sum-

mer-house and would not touch their eggs? For they built in the same spot every year.

He wandered outside the little white wicket-gate which shut off the garden from the paved courtyard, and stood under a large beech-tree on the grass.

A squirrel darted up at his approach and sat motionless on a branch. But he was not caring anything about the squirrels. He was looking at Elspeth's swing hanging on the beech-tree. It had been put up again by his orders, as he had expected her to come out with her father on the previous Saturday to say good-bye to the old place. But her father, at the last moment, had thought it best not. She was a great deal too sharp and asked far too many questions.

A fierce pang shot through the Laird's heart. He might have a pillow on which to lay his head, and shelves on which to put his books. But never again would he have a home in which to welcome the child of his old age. Nor a swing for her to swing on, so that he might hear the music of her childish laughter, as she swung high amongst the leafy branches and startled the squirrels. He was closing the gates of Paradise for her also as well as for himself. He gave a

smothered groan, and a man standing motionless near the gate turned round quickly. It was Davy Andrews. The Laird had not seen him.

"Takin' a bit daunder, Laird?" said Davy with the assurance of an old servant.

"Yes," said the Laird. "It is a beautiful evening."

"Ay, ay," said Davy, and turned his face away. He too left the old place to-morrow and was taking "a bit daunder."

Touch a Scotsman (when you have once found his vulnerable spot), the slightest pin-prick will do, and you will find sentiment. It may take a surgical operation to drive a joke into his head, as our ancient foes, the English, are fond of asserting. I am no judge of that. The quality of humour varies, and where one sees a joke another sees nothing but a mere quibble, not worth changing his facial expression for. That is not to say, however, that he has not perceived what was *intended* to be a joke. But I do know that only the very thinnest layer of epidermis covers the sentiment which lies deep in the soul of the Scot, although he would not own it for the world, and would probably despise me for letting out the secret.

It you watch a Scotch tinker, standing shivering in his rags, gazing over a paling, you may know he is peopling the scene with memories of his past. And the most disreputable-looking urchin amongst the whole ragged company will tell you where you can best see the sun rise from behind the hills. The old toothless crone, whom you may meet in your rambles over the moors, mumbling amongst the ruins of a homestead, is peopling them with life, forming them once more into a cottar's home, where women croon and babes weep as in the past.

The Laird walked quickly away from Davy across the flagged courtyard. He was not in the mood for talk with his fellow-men. He craved for Solitude, that nurse of full-grown souls.

On every door of the farm-steading loomed bills in large lettering:—"Displenishing Sale," "Roup of Valuable Stock," "Arable Land," etc., so many acres, roods, poles.

The Laird turned his eyes away from them, and only saw the big letters in a mist as he passed.

A quarrelsome fowl flew down from her roost in the hen-house with an angry "Tchk—tchk—

tchk——” at some other one usurping her position on the perch.

Cattle lowed in the byre and the farm horses neighed in their stable. But, in a small stable at the end of the yard, there whinnied and nickered the voice of Donald Dhu, frantic with joy at the sound of his master's footsteps. The Laird unlocked the door and passed in. Here was the dumb companion of his lonely years.

The pony laid a loving head upon his master's arm, eating the sugar which the Laird had brought with avidity and delicate crunchings. The eyes of the petted creature were soft and limpid with love.

The Laird patted the brown head and stroked the tawny mane.

“We've wandered mony a weary——” he corrected himself, “mony a gladsome fit thegither, you and me, Donald Dhu,” he said, speaking in the homely Scottish dialect, as if the pony understood it better. “We hae come noo to the pairt-ing o' the ways. The minister will be a gude maister to you. He is a smaller and a lichter man than I am. Your burden will be easy in your auld age, Donald, my man. Good-bye, auld faithful freend.”

The pony seemed to understand. When, a few minutes later, the Laird left him, he stamped his feet, and nickered and whinnied as if life were too hard for him. He would rather have been shot by the Laird's own hand, and have lain down beside his mother in the same green pastures where he had scampered as a foal, than change masters, had he be given liberty of choice.

The Laird quietly returned to the house and, changing his coat again, resumed his packing.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CLOSING OF THE GATES

WHEN Mistress Kate came herself to remove the Laird's supper-tray, she found the dainty supper she had prepared for him, the well-cooked milk-porridge and the little glass jug of cream, the crisp delicious oat-cakes, the thin potato scones, and the pats of newly-made butter—all his favourite dainties—untouched.

"Oh—sir——" she said, remonstrating, but he raised his hand.

"I wish to speak to you, Katherine—to say good-bye. I am going early to-morrow morning."

He paused a moment as he saw her turn a shade paler.

"It is not an easy thing to say good-bye after ten years together—ten years of faithful service on your part, Katherine, and many kindnesses done to me and mine—but it has to be done. Here you will find your wages," he handed an envelope

to her across the table, "and for three months extra. That will give you a rest until you find something to do. Changes are coming in my nephew's household. He may need you for a time. And then—perhaps—I hope," he added, with a smile, "the Canadian lad may be able to send for you across the sea to a home of your own. I am a poor man, but I will gladly pay your passage-money for you. Or if I can help you in any other way——"

Here the housekeeper could control herself no longer. She had been screwing her black alpaca apron round and round, till it bore no semblance to an apron at all, in her efforts to control her feelings, so as not to upset her master. Now she held it up to her face, her pent-up feelings gave way, and she burst into a fit of uncontrollable weeping.

"Oh—sir—sir——" she sobbed; "if you would only let me go with you, to work for you and fend for you. I want no wages—and no lad in Canada—he can wait. To think of you in two rooms in Mistress Cameron's wee bit hoosie in the village—and you used to this a' your life—just breaks my he'rt. And Mistress Cameron canna cook, they say, and she doesna know the things

you like—and you're getting old, sir—excuse me."

The Laird smiled, but he was ill at ease. He was not used to women's tears. They discomposed him. His mother had been a woman of stern self-control.

"Not so very old, Katherine," he said jokingly; "old to you, perhaps. I am not seventy till Midsummer, and I am strong. At threescore-and-ten my natural vigour is not abated. I have all my faculties quite unimpaired, thanks be to God for His many mercies, and for the quiet life He has permitted me hitherto to lead. My forebears have been long lived." And he looked as if he thought it rather a pity.

Then she began pleading that she might go with him to nurse him when he should be ill.

"But I am never ill," he assured her. "You know that. Besides, I am too poor now. I cannot afford to keep a housekeeper, even if I would. And there would be no room for you in Mistress Cameron's house. I have taken the only rooms she has for myself. You need not fear, I shall be perfectly happy," he said, rising, and holding out his hand to her. "And oh, spare me, Katherine,"

he added, as she went on sobbing, "for it is hard enough as it is, God knows."

The housekeeper seized the hand he held out to her, and, raising it to her lips, kissed it fervently. The Laird was to her as a king amongst men.

The shy, sensitive old bachelor looked a little embarrassed. Then she fled to the silence and seclusion of her own room.

It was well on in the small hours of the morning before the Laird sought his, and then only for a short rest. Sleep had forsaken him that night.

Before that he went through his usual practice of locking up, seeing to the bolts of doors and windows, with his chamber candle held high in his hand.

In the large east room he set it down on the table for a few moments and glanced around. Everything was dismantled. This had been the chief reception-room of the house and of late years had seldom been used. It had a musty smell about it. The old-fashioned chairs of carved oak, dark with age and much polishing, were piled together. These were going to help

to furnish his two rooms. On the round spindle-legged table and old-fashioned piano some things were lying ready for the housekeeper to pack for him next day. A trayful of geological specimens picked up in his own travels; marbles brought to him by his nephew from Italy; quartz sent him in his earlier days from Australia; specimens of ore from Cornish and Welsh mines; and fossils from his own hills. He had never been beyond Paris himself, but had explored Great Britain with the keen eye of the geological enthusiast and expert.

A few pieces of old china also lay here waiting to be packed, handleless cups and quaint bowls, his mother's treasures. And, beside them, two long pastoral staves made of crystal (or a substance resembling it), which had been the mystery of his childhood. The hooks from which they had been suspended were still over the mantelpiece. He lifted up one of them and wondered if wadding—as Mistress Kate had suggested—was the best thing to pack them in. They were very brittle.

“They are the mystery of our house,” he had been in the habit of laughingly informing his few stray visitors. “Tradition says they were given

to an ancestor of ours by King James IV., but why, we do not know. Why long pastoral crooks? and why made of this brittle and unusual substance? The ancestor to whom they were given was killed at the Battle of Flodden, and his widow died at the birth of her posthumous son, from the shock of the bad news. There was no one left to tell the tale and explain, but the staves were evidently considered of great value, and were preserved for the orphaned babe. It is through him and his heirs that they have descended to me.

“We have been a pastoral family, perhaps that was the explanation of the gift. The one killed at Flodden was the only fighter. That I am no farmer is for no lack of pastoral blood. It is because I am a freak, like the fighter. But there have been several courtiers amongst us, and we have a family tree and a few heirlooms. Our family is old and—if I may say it without boasting—honourable, although it is now almost extinct. One of our ancestors was Comptroller of the Household to the ill-fated Mary, Queen of Scots.”

The Laird laid down the precious, mysterious crystal staff with the history attached to it, in

the heart-felt hope that neither of them would be broken in their transit to his new home.

Then he went upstairs, and into the large room with the baize doors, the old nursery of the house. Here, as a child, he used to play. There was the rocking-chair where his mother used to sit rocking his little brothers, who were all younger than himself. He could see her now, and hear her softly crooning to the babe in the old-fashioned wooden cradle, with her foot on the rockers while she knitted.

Here, too, was the Dragon's bed, and Elspeth's little cot, just as they had left them when they went back to the town last time. The blankets and quilts were all neatly folded, ready for airing when they should be coming back again.

He turned away from that room very quickly, and entered a smaller one close by, which had two windows set in an angle at the end of the passage. A large four-post mahogany bedstead, with curtains of ancient-patterned, but spotlessly clean, chintz, occupied the centre of the room, covered with an embroidered quilt worked in faded silks of æsthetic shades.

He went over and looked at the bed. For

THE CLOSING OF THE GATES 243

many years he had entered that room early every morning, carrying in his own hand a cup of tea, and had been greeted by the occupant of the bed with a pleasant smile and cheery question.

"Did you make my tea with your own hands, Charles, my son?"

And his laughing answer was always the same.

"With my own hands, mother. And the cream is from your own cow's boyne in the dairy."

"Then it is good, my son. Pull up the easter blind and let me see the sun rising over the young plantation."

It was not many years before—only ten, for she had lived to be over ninety—that going in one morning as usual with his mother's cup of tea, for the first time in his life he received no greeting, and peeping behind the curtains, he found her asleep. When he gently pulled up the easter blind to wake her, he saw that a miracle had happened in the night, and that all the wrinkles, gathered up in her ninety and odd years' pilgrimage, had been smoothed away from the familiar features. It was the face of a woman in her prime which lay on the pillow, with the morning sun-

shine streaming all around her. The face of Death turned towards the Sun of Life.

The Laird walked now to that easter window and looked out. Over what his mother called the "young plantation"—it was full-grown now—the rosy flush which precedes the dawn was already spreading along the sky. In those northern latitudes there is little light at that season of the year. The afterglow has barely faded in the west before the blushing dawn asserts its reappearance in the east.

It had been a perfect night, with a young silvery moon sailing in majesty through the sky. Now, when the distant peaks of the mountains cast their dark jagged silhouettes against the skyline, the stars were already paling in their brilliance before the light of the coming day. Far to the eastward the darkness of the deep blue sky had faded into a paler shade, and a wondrous light gleamed behind it, as of some glory shining through a transparency of blue. It passed through a succession of shades, each paler than the last, into pink, gold, amber, then softest green, deepening again to blue, which darkened till it reached the trees of the avenue near the house. Then it shone through quivering traceries of pop-

lar, and sycamore, and beech, till the deep soft shades of night lying over the house were once more reached.

The Laird lingered long at the window watching the glorious panorama of changing colours. Then, passing out of the room, he closed the door softly behind him, as one closes it on the dead. That part of his life was over. Henceforth, his face was turned towards the dawn.

A morning of glorious promise followed that radiant sunrise. The larks were carolling love-songs all over his fields, in wonderful trills and waterfalls of sound, when the Laird left his own house for the last time, before any one else was stirring.

He had thought his good-byes all said, but a thrush, not to be outdone, called out "Farewell," from a lilac bush. A light breeze blowing over a bed of wallflowers stirred his silver curls and wafted a kiss of fragrance to him. A blush rose bush beside the porch, blown by the breeze against his coat, thrust a half-opened bud into his hand. He stooped and plucked it tenderly and laid it in his pocket-book, placing it back beside his bursting heart.

With firm step and head erect he passed on,

through the young greenery of the beech-trees, to a short cut which led through the meadow to the main road. As his foot struck the metal of the road Donald Dhu heard it and whinnied. But the Laird looked neither to the right side nor to the left. With a firm hand he tied up the gate of the field with its piece of hempen rope, thus closing the gates of his earthly paradise with his own hand. He said softly to himself as he did so:—

“Thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness . . . to the promise of an eternal inheritance . . . incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away.

“‘Happy is he . . . whose hope is in the Lord his God.’”

Then with his face set towards the silences of the everlasting hills, now lying bathed in the glory of the morning sun, he walked through dewy hedgerows, white with scented hawthorn, into the “young plantation,” and, emerging from it on the other side, he passed on to his conflict alone, up on the moors, where there were only the curlews to see him.

He looked back once before he went quite out of sight of his earthly Eden. A glint of brilliant

THE CLOSING OF THE GATES 247

sunshine shone on the white bill of sale pasted on the gate-post. That was the cruellest stab of all. He turned his face quickly away from it, and strode on fiercely for a few minutes, pierced to the heart. For that was to him as the sword of the angel barring the entrance.

But when, in the evening of that same day, he reached the widow's cottage in the little village amongst the hills, and the two small rooms, which were now to be his home for the rest of his life, till in the fulness of time God called him to that other inheritance awaiting him, he met her anxious looks with gentle, smiling ones. No trace of the long day's anguish remained on his calm face, but on it there shone the peace of a great renunciation.

CHAPTER XVII

SCOTTISH MARTYRS

THERE came a year of changes after the Laird closed the gates of his earthly Eden with his own hands. It was a changing year for every one concerned.

Sometimes it seems as if the kaleidoscope of life is shaken violently by an unseen hand. All the pieces, hitherto remaining in the same quiet positions, change places and alter their points of view without any of them being missing. In the life of Elspeth and her friends during that year no old ones passed away. Nevertheless everything changed.

To begin with, she had her eighth birthday, and consequently reached the age limit of the Misses Stewarts' school. Something else had to be arranged, some other fields and pastures of education had to be provided for her.

Grandfather went to the grand final "breaking-up" at the Select Seminary in the square, as representing the family, Elspeth's father being

engaged in business in London. (It was strange how much business he had to take him to London about that time.) Grandfather and she came away together from the Misses Stewarts' literally with flying colours—at least grandfather did. For Elspeth, having refused to part with her hard-won prizes, with the precious Good Conduct one lying on the top, he was perforce obliged to carry home all the trophies of her industry in the shape of penwipers, markers, kettle-holders, and needle-books of wool-work and perforated cardboard. Indeed, so gaily be-ribboned was the Elder that he came down the square in a perfect flutter of colours, purple, red, blue, green, pink, and yellow, looking positively rakish. The hand, with which he raised his hat on leaving Miss Maria Stewart at the door, went up to it fluttering in all the colours of the rainbow.

Miss Maria had called him back, as it was her custom to have a few private words with the parents of any pupil who was leaving only on account of the age limit.

"You see, Mr. Grant," she explained, "we have to make a limit. My father, whom you may remember (he was the Independent minister in this town), used to say that the world would be

a much easier place to live in if people would only recognise their limitations. So my sister and I have tried to recognise ours. We are not accomplished, Mr. Grant, and do not pretend to be. We leave that for our youngest sister, who has been governess, as you know, for many years in the family of Lord B——.

“But I do profess to be able to teach English, and to ground my pupils thoroughly in their own language. And my sister endeavours to inculcate a love for the fine arts in a very much neglected sphere of ladies’ education nowadays, namely, needlework, both ornamental and plain. Our pupils succeed, sir, in other departments when they leave us. Eight is a very good age to begin the lighter branches of education. It is neither too late nor too early, and we have the assurance that they have been thoroughly grounded in the rudiments of learning.

“Oh, yes. Your little granddaughter has very good abilities indeed, and will succeed if she applies herself. But she is very mischievous; and I confess it is an astonishment to me that she carries off the Conduct Prize.

“Oh no, I don’t mean to say it is undeserved. Our system of marks is very fair. The prize goes

to the one who has had no bad tickets for the whole year. But I don't know how Elspeth has steered clear this year, I am sure. She has been sailing pretty near the wind several times."

Here the old gentleman perceived Elspeth prancing with impatience at the gate, and knowing Miss Maria to be somewhat long-winded, her conversational powers, when once fairly started on her scholastic hobby, knowing no limitations whatever, said "Good day" rather hastily.

The Dragon had argued with Elspeth before she left home that morning that *she* would never get the Conduct Prize if she lived to be the age of Methuselah, so she did not know how to restrain herself now from running away from her grandfather to show her hard-won victory.

In August the little family went to Arran, both houses being locked up, the Elder's housekeeper going north to her own people for a holiday. As Elspeth's father wanted to go on fishing and walking expeditions, he had chosen a cottage in a remote, little-frequented corner of the island. It stood perched up on a rocky promontory, like the nest of the golden eagle which they could see not very far away, and looked down over a wide sweep of sea and rock-bound coast, and it had a zigzag

private path which led through a stunted wood to the seashore. It was a month of unalloyed delight to Elspeth, so far as afternoons and evenings were concerned. Of the mornings she preferred not to think. For then she had to bathe.

It was by no means the same kind of bathing as that in the Laird's delighful dam. First of all she had to undress in the lee of a rock on the beach, and clothe herself, shivering, in a cotton nightgown. In vain she begged for one of her winter flannel ones. The Dragon refused to encourage such extravagance, as she said the seawater would "shrink" them.

The weather was very cold for the time of year. It was more like October than August, and the wind blew from whatever quarter it was not wanted to blow. Small garments rose fluttering in the air as fast as they were taken off, and had to be captured, and kept down by heavy stones, as Elspeth slowly undressed. Through it all there was the misery of anticipation of what was to come. The Dragon kept up a running commentary of remarks from the other side of the rock on her slowness.

"What a time you are! Hurry now! You

know it takes you about ten minutes to get down to the sea. Your feet seem so tender."

"What was that blew away just now? You're letting your clothes blow away on purpose, just to take up time running after them. They'll be blowing into the sea next."

At last Elspeth could dally no longer, and had to start by herself for the detested water. She trod slowly and gingerly on the stones with her bare feet, but was generally caught up and seized by the hand by the Dragon long before she reached the sea.

An almost unrecognisable Dragon, disguised for contact with the ocean wave nearly as much as a professional diver. A huge, shapeless cap of black india-rubber encircled her head and ears, drawn tight with tape round her neck and over her forehead. A long, shapeless, sack-like robe of thick blue flannel, with slits left in the seams for the arms, hung in classic looseness from another string round her neck, enveloping her form from head to foot. (Directoire bathing-costumes were not in it in those days.) An unruly robe it was too when it was wet and heavy, always trying to get away from its tethering string, and slip-

ping off first one shoulder, then the other, and having to be dragged up again.

"Come away, now, be brave," said Janet encouragingly, as she dragged the reluctant cotton-clad figure into the sea. "Think of the Wigtown martyrs, that you are so fond of hearing about, how brave they were. And they were not much older than you. Agnes Wilson was just twelve. You wouldn't be a coward, would you?"

"But they didn't—dr-own—Agnes," chattered the teeth of Elspeth.

"No, and I am not going to drown you. But they drowned Margaret, and she was only eighteen. There is not much difference between eight and eighteen." (Isn't there?)

"Oh, nonsense, now, that wasn't a cutty stone at all. You'll find the stones won't cut when you get in deeper. Come away."

A big wave at this moment raced in at full speed and hit them both a violent blow, taking away Elspeth's breath and nearly knocking her down.

"Were the waves in the Solway as horr-horr-*horrible* as these?" she asked, after a few more steps had been taken and they stopped a few moments for the preliminary performance of damp-

ing Elspeth's head, the Dragon's waterproof encasement on hers rendering her impervious to taking cold.

"Oh, the waves were far worse than these. The tide in the Solway races in faster than a man can gallop on horseback," said Janet, dragging her charge in a little deeper.

"Then they wouldn't take long to dr-r-own," said Elspeth, glad to talk so as to gain time.

"Oh yes, they did. They were at the part where it doesn't come in fast, and they were tied to stakes. It had to come creeping up—and up—and up—slowly. And they sang Psalms and were brave."

"Not like me," said Elspeth. "But I think I could hang easier than drown. I would be braver over hanging. Am I not in deep enough yet, do you think?"

"Yes, I think you are. Now then, shut your mouth and eyes, and you are to come up all by yourself when I put you down. And you are not to cling on to me, mind."

Elspeth obeyed by clenching her teeth firmly together and shutting her eyes. But she forgot to close her lips, so as she went down bodily into the clear green water, surrendering herself into

Janet's firm hands with a silent prayer for courage, there was the gleam of a whole row of small teeth visible even until she reached the very bottom. The result was that she came up choking and gurgling, gasping for breath, clutching on to Janet as with a death-grip.

Janet was a woman of many theories, gastro-nomic and otherwise, from castor-oil every fortnight, to cupfuls of sea-water to be drunk every morning before breakfast at the seaside, which accustomed you to the taste of salt water, previous to swallowing gallons of it while bathing. One of her theories was that it taught a child to float—as a preliminary to swimming—to put it down on its back to the bottom of the sea, and then leave go and let it come up by itself. It gave it confidence to feel the buoyancy of the sea-water, she thought.

But oh! nobody knows what a horrible sensation that is unless they try it. To feel oneself in the grasp of something very strong and very firm as you go down, then to have your clinging clasp relaxed (with a slap to make you leave go, if necessary), and to be left struggling in the mighty ocean, with your feet slipping away from you whenever you try to use them!

Elspeth came up spluttering every time, imploring not to be put down again.

"If I might just lie down by myself, Janet. I *would* lie down, really, truly, on my honour. Or if you'd let me have a flannel nightgown on next time it wouldn't be quite so bad. *Please Janet,*" she implored. "*Dear Janet. Oh——!*"

Down she went again. Janet had no mercy.

"Better get it over," she said, as Elspeth came up the second time, and popped her down the third time before she had time to gasp out a word.

Then she was told to go and "play herself," while Janet did her own personal dumb-crambo show of bobbing up and down in the sea. As if any one could "play themselves" after that! Elspeth went to the edge of the water and wept and shivered there every day till Janet came out, hurt pride battling with cold and suffocation.

"You are really the biggest coward I ever came across," was Janet's daily remark, as she dragged the blue and weeping bather up the stony beach to the natural dressing-room behind the rocks. "The very biggest. Take no notice of the cutty stones, as you call them. Walk fast and then you won't feel them."

But that ordeal over in the morning, there was

nothing but unalloyed pleasure for the rest of the day. As soon as Elspeth was dressed (the garments never blew away during the dressing process, however windy it was, strange to say,) she ran straight like a dart to where, in modest and discreet seclusion, grandfather waited for her on the other side of the wood. Waited, not empty-handed either, but with a bag full of gingerbread nuts, which he had walked a mile to the village post office to buy for her, having great faith in the efficacy of gingerbread as a "chittering bite."

"I have found out the reason why grandpapa and I are such good friends," announced Elspeth suddenly one evening to her father. "Sometimes you are cross with me and we have little tiffs, don't we, father? But grandpapa and I never have any."

"For a very easy reason to find out," said her father. "He gives you your own way in every single thing. You couldn't very well have tiffs with anybody like that."

"I suppose you think she doesn't manage you as well as me," remarked grandfather dryly.

"Oh, but that is not the reason at all," said Elspeth hastily, not desiring to hear any discus-

sions on that point. "The reason is that grandpapa and I are both such terrible cowards."

The Elder's Highland blood flushed into his old cheeks hotly.

"I'd like to see the man who would dare to say that to me," said he. "Explain yourself, if you please, miss."

"Well, you see, grandpapa, it is quite easy. It's like parsing. You have just got to change the preposition. I am terrified *in* the water, and you are terrified *on* it," said Elspeth, airing her newly-acquired grammar.

Her father laughed loudly. The Elder joined in feebly in an attempt to laugh at his own expense. For indeed it was quite true. As Elspeth's morning ordeal waned in the background, so did her grandfather's evening one wax large in the horizon as it drew near.

The Elder, being an inland-bred man with no boating experience, had a perfect abhorrence of boats of all kinds smaller than steamers, preferring deep-sea-going ones even at that, as being stronger than the others. To trust precious lives in the frail cockle-shells which Elspeth and her father were in the habit of frequenting in the evenings,

with but a plank between them and eternity, was in his eyes a fair tempting of Providence.

At first he flatly refused to accompany them on their boating expeditions, and stood wringing his hands on the shelving rock from which they had pushed off till they were out of sight. Until one night, when they went out against all his persuasions in what he called "rough weather," but what they said was "just nice." The agonies of mind which the old man went through as he saw his beloved ones tossing in their frail bark, now perched up on the top of a breaker, now vanishing altogether in the trough of the sea, made him resolve that if they were determined to perish in a watery grave they should not go to the bottom without him. The next evening he slipped, unobserved, into the kitchen and handed his gold watch and chain to Janet.

"I am going with them to-night," he said. "If we come back safe and sound, please God, I'll have my watch and chain back again. If not, you need not hand it to my executors. I have left a note for them in my pocket-book in my room explaining about it. You can just keep it for yourself, Janet, for looking after the child. I

have not always approved of your methods, as you know, for I have not scrupled to speak my mind to you sometimes, but your intentions, I am aware, regarding her have been good. You have been faithful to your duties both to your master and to her."

And he walked away down the hill after the giddy boating couple with the firm tramp of the Highlander on his way to execution. The very swing of his coat-tails was reminiscent of the kilts of his ancestors, as they swung into their northern forays with the fierce cry of:—"A Grant to the rescue." Or its equivalent in Gaelic.

The last week of that month in Arran was absolute perfection, and stood out in Elspeth's memory in after years as if glorified by the rays of a setting sun. Summer seemed to have come back, the air was balmy and soft, and the sea was like a lake.

Then, in the first place, she had the great good fortune, while hovering near the edge of the sea after bathing, to tread on a small jellyfish and get her foot stung. Her father, on being appealed to, said she need not bathe any more.

"I verily believe you did it on purpose, so as

to get let off bathing," said the suspicious Dragon, as she bathed and bandaged the slightly swollen foot.

"I *truly* didn't."

"Well, you had no business stopping at the edge and crying as you did. If you had been in deeper you would have seen it floating about. If it had been a big one you would have known it. It must have been a very little one."

"It *was* a little one. I said it was."

"Well, you made enough noise over it. You couldn't have made more if a shark had got hold of you. A big girl like you squealing out like that! You ought to think shame of yourself. You *are* a coward, really."

"I wish you saw grandpapa holding on to the edge of the boat at nights," said Elspeth irrelevantly.

The Dragon disdained to reply to this remark.

"He jumps up if he sees a big lump of seaweed coming. Father says if we are all in the water one of these nights he won't be surprised. And it will be grandpapa who has done it. He nearly upsets the whole hypothec every time."

Janet remained silent, and Elspeth, having successfully introduced a long word into her sentence,

and apparently clinched the argument at the same time, looked, as she felt, extremely virtuous.

In the second place, the Laird came to spend that last week with them, and with her three lovers all at once Elspeth was in her element.

If her father and the Laird went off on walking tours which involved a whole day's absence together, she and her grandfather gathered shells on the beach, made crabs run races, and ate ginger-snaps to their heart's content, coolly ignoring Janet's cutting remarks on their having no appetites at dinner-time.

If the Laird happened to be the one who was left behind, Elspeth, leaning heavily on his arm (for she became lamer every day after his tender inquiry, "How is the poor foot this morning, dearie?"), roamed with him in the woods, looking for ferns and listening to the legend of the Osmunda Regis. No one could tell stories like the Laird. He peopled every glen with fairies and pixies, and you had only to walk with him to hear the dryads whispering amongst the trees, and the gnomes knocking in their subterranean passages under the hills. There was the leprechaun sitting on a whin-bush, flitting farther away as you came nearer, vanishing with mocking laugh-

ter into rocky crevices. And there were witches and warlocks tobogganing down the course of the waterfall in the wood at the back of the house, if you only knew the right time of the day to go and look for them.

With her father Elspeth was seldom alone, the two old gentlemen—if one might use such an adjective in describing septuagenarians who were still in the prime of their youthful vigour—not having, perhaps, very much in common.

For although the Elder looked up to the gentle and dignified Laird, greatly admiring him as a man of learning and a fine classical scholar, he privately rather despised him for his poor business capabilities.

“If that fine land, lying in the midst of such a fertile strath, had been mine, I would not have parted with it in any such quixotic fashion,” he would say. “I know nothing at all about farming, having been chained to a desk all my life, but I would have applied myself to studying it and redeeming the bonds. I would not have parted with the property. Besides, here am I, with capital lying by, and nobody belonging to me except the child, I would have been only too glad to have advanced it. It might as well have

been invested in that land, which has belonged to her forebears for generations, as anywhere else, and I would only have charged a small percentage of interest for it. None at all, if he would have let me. But no, he must follow out his own obstinate, quixotic ideas. Highland pride, I call it—sheer folly.”

The Laird, on his part, was slightly nervous in the presence of the keen, hard-headed man of business. But the two gentlemen were vastly polite to each other, after the manner of their more courteous generation, saying, “After you, sir,” with a low bow, every evening on the shelving rock, while the boat waited for them on the dancing waves underneath, until several times they were in danger of both being left behind together.

The Elder waxed quite valiant when he saw the Laird’s fine stroke at the oar, and sat in the stern, holding firmly to the skirts of his wriggling grandchild, whose services had been dispensed with, with a comparatively easy expression of countenance.

“You are a fine oarsman, sir,” he complimented the Laird. “I could almost enjoy boating with you. But when it comes to Elspeth and

her father rowing it is absolute misery to me. Hugh is young and rash and very erratic in his performances. While as for the child——! What between their seafaring expressions to each other, picked out of some nautical storybook, I don't doubt, and their contradictory orders of "larboard," "starboard," "feather your oars," "backwater," and so on, I don't know where I am. I just sit and mutter savage expressions to myself in Gaelic all the time. The only thing I do understand is "feathering oars," for that means I get a ducking from head to foot, every time Elspeth raises her oar in some fantastic fashion in obedience to her father's orders. I see no sense in the thing at all. But it is quite different when you are there, sir. I could almost enjoy it."

Indeed it was very beautiful, and only lasted too short a time. To see the sun setting over the sea, casting its rays of glory around the hills, touching, as with loving reverence, the two venerable heads, as, hatless, they let the breeze play over their crowns of beautiful silver hair—curly and straight—was a sight to live in the memory for ever.

That last week ended only too soon, and one bright morning you might have seen them all

packed in the big ferry-boat, waiting for the steamer to take them home. The Dragon counting boxes and fussing over the luggage, for fear she had left anything behind. Elspeth, with a big pickle-jar full of sea-anemones and salt water on her lap, which she was constantly spilling, either over herself or some one else. Her father looking regretfully at the receding cliffs, whistling hard—boyish fashion—to conceal his feelings of regret at leaving. The Laird watching the sea-gulls swoop down to eat the crumbs he had brought for them in his capacious pockets. And grandfather holding on to what he called a “tirl-pin,” in preparation for the wash of the waves from the big steamer from Campbeltown, as it came up to them, hooting proudly.

Then at last they were all safely transferred to its decks, bag and baggage, a family of irresponsibles (more or less), the only level head amongst them being that of the Dragon. And so to Glasgow and home.

CHAPTER XVIII

FAREWELL TO BARBARISM

IT was the week after they reached home that the news came to Elspeth, which, to use her own somewhat quaint phraseology, seemed to come upon her "just like a thunder-plump," and took her breath away completely, rendering her giddy and bewildered for the rest of her holidays in that old familiar grey house in the square, which had been her home all her life.

For then her father broke to her very tenderly and gently, but with much inward trepidation and some expectation of arguments and tears, that it had been decided to send her to a boarding-school at the beginning of the new term.

He drew her very close to him as he did so, resting his dark moustache against her ruddy hair, so that he might not see the expression of her face, prepared to be very sympathetic and tender, but very firm.

But, greatly to his surprise, Elspeth took it (outwardly) very quietly. It was those constant, un-

expected surprises which she was continually giving him, that made him feel so helpless with this strange woman-child of his.

She was only silent for a few moments, and then asked in very subdued tones, with a little quiver of her lips:

"Have I not been a good girl then, father, that you are going to send me away from you?"

"Oh yes, you have been a *very* good girl. But, you see, grandpapa and I think you have been long enough at home here alone with Janet. And the new mother who is coming—she has to be considered now too, you know—thinks we are all barbarians up here in the north. She seems to think we are only half-civilised yet in Scotland. So I would like to get you polished up a little before she comes."

"And will you be going to some sort of a grown-up school too, father?" she asked, presently.

He laughed at that, and shook his head.

"No. I think she will have to take me in hand and polish me up herself when she comes here. But you are different. And grandpapa and I don't care very much for any of the ladies' boarding-schools in this town."

Elsbeth looked aghast at that.

"Where am I going to then, father?"

"You are going away to London to school. To a very fine school in the West End, near Hyde Park, which Miss Lilian has found for you. Where the young ladies go for rides in Rotten Row twice a week with their riding-master, and you will be able to walk with your young companions by the banks of the Serpentine, that you are so fond of talking about, every day of your life."

And that was what took Elspeth's breath away. To go to London, and see Queen Victoria with her crown on. To get into personal touch, so to speak, with her most Gracious Majesty! To walk on those golden streets and meet the ladies glittering with diamonds and precious stones, as she had read about in descriptions of the drawing-rooms at Buckingham Palace. Think of it, staid, Scottish stay-at-homes!

There were only three weeks remaining of her time at home, and they passed in a perfect whirl. Dressmakers, milliners, shoe-makers, box-makers, all were requisitioned in haste.

The Dragon wiped her eyes silently, as she washed and ironed for her charge, and was

strangely gentle as she packed familiar and favourite belongings into the new boxes.

Elsbeth flew backwards and forwards in a tremendous state of excitement, between her grandfather's house and her own. He had presents waiting for her every day.

"Look at the beautiful case he has given me for writing my letters to him. Real morocco, look, and all the envelopes and paper are stamped with my initials on. And there are five shillings' worth of stamps. That means a letter to him every week for a year, he says, and eight extra ones for birthdays and things," chattered Elsbeth to Janet, when she came bounding in one day.

"And look," she said another day, "he's given me 'Ministering Children,' and he says I am to be careful when I open it, for it is not very well bound. Why is he giving me a new book not very well bound, do you think?"

"I think we'd better look and see," said the careful Janet, untying the parcel. And there was a beautiful copy of "Ministering Children," but when you shook it you found it was, as grandfather said, not very well bound, for five new, crisp, single pound notes came fluttering

out of it, his loving gift for his little maid to "keep her pocket."

There were enough boxes of chocolate creams (which he had been buying by the dozen at a time, ever since Hendry had initiated her into the glories of it), and shortbread, and tins of fancy biscuits, sent around to stock a siege. Elspeth bid fair to be popular amongst her school-fellows, by reason of the abundance of her grandfather's gifts to be shared with them. For even so would he pave the stony path of learning for the spoilt darling of his heart.

The Laird also sent parting gifts to her by post, in the shape of books. Mrs. Hemans' poems, and Moore's, with inscriptions written on the fly-leaf in his fine, copper-plate handwriting, announcing that they were:—

"Presented to Miss Elspeth Grant Arnot, on her departure for the Metropolis."

There was also a volume of Robert Burns's poems, so that she might not forget her nationality during her residence in perfidious Albion. But it was swiftly confiscated by the Dragon, and consigned, with a look of horror, to the flames of perdition at the back of her kitchen range. That unholy poet!

Then the last day at home came, and with it the Laird himself.

"I just couldn't stay away," he said simply.

The whole of the quaint little family party went to the station together to see Elspeth and her father off to London by the night mail.

While her father was busy arranging with the guard for her comfort during the night, making up a temporary bed for her in the first-class carriage reserved for them, by means of an ingenious contrivance of planks, walking-sticks, and umbrellas, Elspeth stood white and silent on the platform between her two knights-errant.

Only now, after all the excitement of the last three weeks, had she begun to realise that parting from all her loved ones was an inevitable part of her going away to London. Her grandfather stood holding her right hand tight in his left. The Laird had the other almost swallowed up in his large and loving grasp. Janet leant against a pillar behind them, occasionally wiping her eyes with a clean pocket-handkerchief which she had not even taken the trouble to unfold.

There was a great bustle and confusion at the last. Good-byes were hurriedly said, and Elspeth was hastily lifted into the carriage beside her

father by the Laird, who kissed her fondly, murmuring softly under his breath as he did so:—

“ ‘May the Lord bless you and keep you, and make His face to shine upon you.’ ”

At the very last moment grandfather came close up to the carriage window.

“Come here a minute,” he said.

The child obeyed wonderingly.

Then the Elder put his face through the carriage window, and, thrusting aside all the Scottish prejudices engrained in him for generations, kissed her thus publicly, though it was for the first and only time in her life. A good, loud, smacking kiss it was too, loud enough for everybody round to hear. So he had known how to do it all the time!

“Stand back there,” shouted the stentorian tones of the guard, waving his flag.

Grandfather stepped deftly aside, and the train, with loud snort and puff, glided away with its precious freight into the unknown, carrying with it the little Scottish cairngorm on her way to the English lapidaries, while her two Knights of the Silver Hair were left standing desolate on the platform, with the Dragon weeping silently behind them.

"It can never be the same again," said grandfather, in rather a husky tone of voice, as, after speaking a few kindly words to the disconsolate Janet, he and the Laird walked away together, the latter having accepted his hospitality for the night. "Never the same. For that child is a born mimic, and, without knowing it, speaks like whoever she is with. I have heard her speaking so Highland to my housekeeper that I expected to hear her break out into Gaelic every minute. And as for that Irishman who kept the boat down in Arran—you remember him?—she had got his brogue as pat as himself. You would have thought to hear her she had been kissing the Blarney Stone. She'll take to the English accent like a duck takes to the water, and be clipping her words in that Cockney style like the rest of them when she comes back. And she will never be the same simple Scotch lassie again."

There were a good many other things which would never be the same when she came back again besides her accent. But of them grandfather said nothing, although, no doubt, they were at the back of his mind all the time.

The Laird replied very sadly:

"It can certainly never be the same again in this world to me."

As for Janet, she went up to her sister's house for the night, and the quondam doorkeeper, with her new spouse, the beadle, heard her weeping through the partition which separated their rooms well on into the small hours.

"Hark till her! I never thought she had so much affection in her," whispered the wife to her husband. "She was always so hard on that poor bairn. I think some of it must be—re—re—I canna mind the word I want."

"Revenge," suggested the beadle, who was somewhat slow of wit. Then added reverently, as became the one who carried Mr. Morrison's Bible into the pulpit every Sabbath: "'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' saith the Lord."

"Tuts!" said his wife, "that's not the word I mean at all. Remorse, that's it."

CHAPTER XIX

ROSES AND FORGET-ME-NOTS

JANET, unable to bear the desolation of the empty nest, with its solitary little bird flown, left at the ensuing term, six weeks later. She went this time to keep house for an elderly widower in another part of the country, and did not discover until the night she arrived that he was a Unitarian, and of as rigid and unyielding a nature as herself. Stormy times were predicted for them both.

Mistress Kate, the Laird's former housekeeper, came with a young maid to superintend the preparation of the house for the bride. An army of builders, painters, and paper-hangers took possession after Christmas, and the old grey house in the square became metamorphosed in the spring. A new storey arose on the top of it, with a fine bay-window looking far out over the river, and the bridge, to where, on clear days, you could see the sea and sky merging into one.

The moss rose and lily of the valley chintz, lined with rose-pink, the Arabian bedstead, and the rosebud paper, were accomplished facts, waiting for Elspeth's home-coming in the summer holidays. Her mother's piano was moved up into the large new room ready for her to practise her newly-acquired accomplishment on when she liked. Her mother's work-table, with the unfinished little baby's frock in it, and the gold thimble, stood in the recess by the fireplace. Her mother's paintings hung upon the wall. And the desk on which the young wife had been wont to write girlish letters in her delicate Italian hand, stood ready waiting for her little daughter on a new polished writing-table in the window.

"And I would just like the top of the wedding-cake put in a glass case on the piano," wrote Elspeth, in her instructions to her father from London; "and then I'll be quite content with my new room when I come home."

Her father unlocked the sideboard in order to comply with her request. But lo! the wedding-cake was gone bodily, tin and all, and he was too shy, in the circumstances, to inquire what had become of it.

The truth was that Mistress Kate, seeing it

there, had remarked to her assistant, "Fancy him keeping it all those years! Well, he won't want to see it now to remind him of his first. Take it downstairs carefully, and put it in the press in Janet's old room beside Miss Elspeth's toys. She may perhaps like to keep it as a memento of her mamma, as it has been kept so long."

The girl did as she was told, but, unfortunately, she stumbled at the dark corner of the stairs, and the slender sugared vase fell and broke in two. Afraid of being scolded for her carelessness, she said nothing about it, but hid it in the back of the cupboard behind bricks and headless dolls and old tops—Elspeth having been early initiated into such boyish joys by her male relatives.

There Elspeth found it, herself, when searching for other treasures after she came home, with its beauty departed, its bridal flowers all broken, its graceful vase crushed into a shapeless mass. She sat down with it on her lap and wept over it, feeling somehow as if a deep wave of sorrow went over her soul at the sight of it, and at the sacred remembrance of her "little sacraments" with her father, and that old life which had now passed away for ever.

And the remains of the wedding-cake itself,

with its delicious almond and sugar-icing, swung gaily through the town in its tin, amongst other treasures hanging on to the end of a dustman's cart, as he took it away. And he and a fellow-dustman ate it, with many ribald remarks about its being "gey fushionless stuff," when they divided their treasures between them at the end of their daily round.

Thus do all human treasures pass away, and what one holds sacred another laughs at.

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But now it was June, and the day of the wedding.

The old house in the square, fresh and spotless in its new coat of grey paint, was ready, awaiting the coming of its second bride. New lace curtains fluttered at every window, new carpets were laid down, and the emptied drawing-room awaited the opening of the big packing-cases, which were already on their way to Scotland with the new mistress's dainty possessions.

In Kensington Gardens the sun was shining brightly, the birds were singing blithely. It was an ideal day for a wedding.

Crimson baize was laid down on the steps of one of the houses near by, and the bride in her

chamber was robing for the ceremony which was to take place that day.

In the drawing-room adjoining, a cluster of fair bridesmaids waited for her, in filmy gowns of white tulle, with sashes of pale rose-pink silk, and with wreaths of wild pink roses on their heads. There were six of them, of ages varying from twelve to twenty-five.

Six stiff bouquets of pink rosebuds, edged with lace paper, after the fashion of the time—the bridegroom's gifts—resposed in pointed handles of dainty basket-work, tied with pink satin ribbons, on the oval walnut table. A seventh and smaller bouquet, composed of forget-me-nots, lay a little apart, also in its fine wicker handle, but with satin ribbons of pale blue.

The seventh, and odd bridesmaid, attired the same as the others, but with a wide sash of pale blue instead of pink, and her head wreathed with forget-me-nots in place of roses, with sprays of the same flowers stitched round the ruchings of tulle at her throat and wrists, skipped about the room amongst the group, pirouetting, trying new steps learned from her dancing master, and altogether vastly pleased with herself. It was Elspeth, showing off her very first pair of white kid shoes.

She danced along, looking at her feet reflected in the glass mirrors of the walnut chiffonier, showing off her steps and her shoes at the same time.

Outwardly, she was not much changed. A little taller, her curls no longer bobbing thickly round her head, but neatly tied back with pale blue ribbon on the top. That was all the difference in her appearance.

But, inwardly, the last rags and tatters of her barbarism were disappearing, as her grandfather had predicted, very rapidly. She had adapted herself readily to her altered circumstances and had absorbed her environment to some purpose. She bowed gracefully now if you met her out-of-doors, instead of looking shy and awkward and stupid. She said, "I beg your pardon," if she had occasion to push past you, or "Please forgive me," very sweetly; and she spoke with the accent of a veritable daughter of Albion, save for a few barbaric expressions which still occasionally cropped up unawares.

Her prospective stepmother was very pleased with the marked improvement in her manners and appearance, and also with her own choice of a boarding-school for her. Whether her old-fashioned relatives in Scotland would look upon

it as an improvement or not was another matter.

Now, as she waltzed and pirouetted, the youngest of the group of pink bridesmaids, a tall slip of an English maiden of the age of great wisdom—that is to say, twelve—named Julia, who had a pair of soft, velvety dark eyes and a profusion of dark hair, stepped out from amongst them, and taking Elspeth by the arm, led her into the embrasure of a window.

“I think it’s lovely fun being bridesmaids, don’t you?” asked Elspeth, still giving little hops and skips of excitement.

“I don’t see much fun in it,” replied Julia. “My wreath pricks horribly, and those big girls are so stuck up. Besides, you are not a bridesmaid, so you don’t know anything about it.”

Elspeth’s eyes flashed.

“I *am* a bridesmaid. How dare you?”

“You are not,” said Julia calmly. “All the bridesmaids are dressed the same as me with pink. You have got blue.”

“I’ve only got blue because of my queer hair. Pink wouldn’t become it.”

“What colour would you call your hair?” asked Julia, looking at it critically, shaking back her own abundant gipsy locks.

"It depends if people like me or not, I think," said Elspeth simply. "When they don't like me they call it red generally. Grandfather and the Laird—my great-uncle—called it 'Sweet Auburn, mistress of the——' something or other. It was a piece of poetry they said. And my father called it 'bars of ruddy gold.'"

Her eyes took on a dreamy, wistful expression. She was so far away from all those who loved her. "But," she continued innocently, "I think it is copper-coloured myself. I matched it exactly once with a nearly new penny."

"It is *red*," said Julia, with unmistakable emphasis.

Elspeth flushed crimson.

"Oh, but not carrots," she said pleadingly, all the old grievance welling up. "*Please don't* say it is carrots."

"*Carrots*," said the fair Julia. And from within two rows of pearly teeth there came out slowly a long, narrow strip of rose-red flesh. It was the bridesmaid's tongue!

Elspeth gazed horrified. Never even in her naughtiest days had she dared to let a strip of tongue appear from between her own lips. Once only, to relieve her feelings against Janet, had she

ventured to put out a tip in the silence and blackness of the coal-cellar, and all around her she had heard the snipping of the devil's scissors, eager to cut it off. She had never forgotten it.

"If you ever see anybody putting out their tongue," the Dragon had told her emphatically, over and over again, "you may know by that they are the very *lowest* of the *low*."

And here was Julia, her new mother's cousin and bridesmaid, the daughter of a clergyman, and a schoolfellow of her own, showing not only a tip, but the whole thing, fully displayed as if for the doctor's investigation!

Elsbeth turned away in disgust.

"I shall ask mamma if I am not a bridesmaid," she said, lingering a little over that new, delightful word; "for I am sure I am. My father would *never* be married without having me for a bridesmaid."

"*My* cousin Lilian isn't your mamma yet," continued the tormentor.

"She will be by the time the clock strikes twelve," said Elsbeth calmly.

"And she doesn't want you to call her 'mamma' to-day either, for she said so to my mother."

"Why not?"

"Because she doesn't want people to know there is such a little minx as you in existence. So there!"

Further discussion was cut short at this juncture by the entrance of the bride herself.

Very charming did Miss Lilian look in her long trailing bridal robes of white satin, with her lace veil slightly thrown off her face.

There was something not inapt in the Dragon's calling her a "butterfly." So sylph-like was her figure, so small and dainty her waist, so much of the "airy, fairy Lilian" was there about her, that to call her a butterfly was in that sense applicable.

But in nothing else. The slender white hand, on which her lover's diamonds sparkled and glittered, was as firm and practical as the Dragon's own, and as well capable of holding the reins of a somewhat romantic and imaginative household.

Elspeth's father was a man of artistic tastes, and was keenly sensitive to dainty feminine beauty. It was still an age of graceful and delicate femininity. His first wife had done credit to his good taste. So did his second.

A chorus of admiration greeted the bride's appearance. "How sweet!" "How charming!"

"Dearest Lilian, are you not terribly nervous? I should be."

And all the rose-wreathed maidens clustered round her, a pretty group.

The bride was pale, and there were traces of tears round her eyes; but she seated herself calmly enough, and, smiling at the assembled girls, began to put on her gloves.

Elsbeth, having tenderly smoothed down the rich satin of the bride's dress with her fingers (an old, familiar action bred in a wardrobe drawer), withdrew a little from her, not having yet fully recovered from the cold douches administered by Julia. But now she heard that young lady say in a loud, terribly distinct voice to the bride:

"Cousin Lilian, I want to know if Elsbeth is one of your bridesmaids or not. She says she is, and my mamma said she wasn't going to be one. Is she one?"

And the bride's firm answer: "No. Of course she isn't one. You bridesmaids are all in pink. It is a rose wedding."

Elsbeth walked into the embrasure of the window again and waited there silently, watching the carriages arrive in the road beneath to convey them all to church. Under the white frock a lit-

tle heart was beating wildly, and the forget-me-nots round her throat rose and fell tumultuously. Julia followed her.

"I hope you heard," she said.

Elspeth answered her very quietly. She had not learnt self-control in the Dragon's severe school for nothing.

"Yes, I heard, but it makes no difference. I am my father's bridesmaid all the same," she replied.

"Silly! Bridegrooms don't have bridesmaids. They have groomsmen."

"You don't know what they have in Scotland. My father and I are both Scotch. We do Scotch ways," said Elspeth calmly, but with some dignity.

Julia had not thought of that.

"I suppose weddings are quite different in Scotland?" she inquired.

"*Quite* different," replied Elspeth, who had never been at a wedding of any kind in her life before and knew nothing at all about it. She had, however, no intention of giving herself away.

The bridesmaids were here summoned away one by one to their carriages, with Elspeth amongst them, and the conversation ceased.

CHAPTER XX

A PASSING BELL

WHEN the bride's procession formed at the entrance to the church Elspeth dropped behind.

Julia, passing to her place as one of the last pair of bridesmaids, took the opportunity of giving her a wicked pinch on the fleshy part of her arm, which, being only veiled by the thin tulle, hurt her very much, as she passed. But Elspeth was beyond feeling such indignities. She had not seen her father since his visit to London during the Christmas holidays, except for a few flying minutes the night before. She was now going to see him in all the bravery of *his* bridal attire. Not every little girl saw her father married. He should see his one only little bridesmaid with a smiling face under her crown of forget-me-nots, however much her pride had been hurt.

The organ pealed, the procession started slowly up the aisle. Elspeth walked alone behind the six pink bridesmaids with her head erect.

"Give me your hand, dear," said a kind, motherly lady, dressed in mauve silk, who was following. But Elspeth wriggled hers away.

"No, thank you," she whispered back. "You see I am the bridegroom's little bridesmaid, so I must walk alone."

So alone, behind the others, the forget-me-not maiden passed up the aisle, with flushed cheeks and eager eyes, watching for the bridegroom.

The bride and her maidens grouped themselves at the altar. The lady in mauve, standing near the altar-rails, drew Elspeth beside her where she could see better. A corner of the bride's square train spread itself out at her feet. The child was looking straight at her father's face.

"How lovely he is!" thought his bridesmaid adoringly. "I must look at his dress, so as to tell grandpapa all about it when I write to him. White silk waistcoat, white silk tie, the new gold studs that Miss Lilian has given him for a wedding present, a lovely new coat—he said his other was getting rather glazy—and a white rose in his buttonhole, because it is a rose wedding and he loves roses the best of all. I can't see his trousers from here, but he said they were to be lavender to match his gloves. He *does* look beautiful. But

oh! I see some white hairs in his darling head. He had none when I was at home, not one. He has had no little companion to comfort him for a whole year. He was often so very lonely and sad. But he shall have her soon now. It is only six weeks till the summer holidays."

His bridesmaid here thought she had caught his eye and smiled brightly to him. A loving look spread over his expressive face, the look which Elspeth seeing in the old days had responded to always by rushing into his arms, springing upon him in an abandonment of childish affection, to be smothered in loving kisses. She could not do that here, but a rapturous look of responsive love beamed in her face, and she was wreathed in radiant smiles as well as forget-me-nots.

But, alas! the bridegroom never saw her. The truth was he was vastly nervous over the whole affair, and the rustling of the clerical vestments behind the altar-rails almost took away the last remnants of his self-possession. To the simple Scotsman, all this paraphernalia of an English wedding in a fashionable, and rather high, West End church was a terrible experience. The scent of the flowers, the rich tones of the organ, the sweet voices of the choristers, and the movements

of the white-robed clergy, caused something like consternation in the heart of the bridegroom.

On his previous experience of a wedding he had simply listened in silence to a homily addressed to him by the Doctor, his own personal part in the ceremony being confined to the putting on of the ring, and meekly bowing his head in token of acquiescence of the Doctor's exhortations. In the Elder's own house too, surrounded by many sympathetic friends and acquaintances, with his uncle, the Laird, beaming on him all the time, not in a large church with hundreds of people watching, all of them strange, even his very groomsman being an utter stranger to him.

He had been studying the Prayer-book all the way up from Scotland, and was horrified to find he would have to say his part alone and aloud. To speak out loud in a church was a dreadful thing—the horror of a sacrilege inherited from generations of Presbyterian ancestors.

Also, during a little rehearsal of the marriage service at Miss Lilian's house the night before, he had failed in his part signally and utterly, repeating her words instead of his own, and stumbling fatally over the plighting of his troth. It was the bride's face which the nervous bride-

groom sought for encouragement, and, having seen her answering smile to him, he let his loving eyes remain there, and never saw a bridesmaid nor any one else. Then the service commenced.

Slowly it dawned upon Elspeth that she was forgotten. She rose up and knelt down mechanically, with her little face very serious. In those old days, which seemed now to be drifting away so fast, she and her father had always exchanged a little look as they changed positions in church. It was nothing, only that both had loving and sensitive natures, and that in the heart of each there was an empty void, which ached almost without their knowing it.

He had come up to London at Christmas, and on the two Sundays he spent there had taken his little girl to St. Paul's Cathedral, the Foundling Hospital, Westminster Abbey, and to hear the great Spurgeon preach in his Tabernacle. There he had renewed this little tacit arrangement between them, taking her hand softly in his at certain stages, smiling down upon her at others. They were a sentimental couple, both of them, totally un-Scottish in their demonstrative ways when they were alone together with nobody to see.

For the first time in her life the child felt that

she was left absolutely alone, a unit in a crowd. She smiled bravely once more as she rose from her knees the next time, but there was no answering smile from her father. Indeed, his kind face had assumed a rather stern expression, and there were lines of anxiety between his eyes. (Had he put the ring in his pocket, or not? when he was hesitating which waistcoat to put on—the white or the black. That was what he was worrying about.)

It was very silly of Elspeth, no doubt, but the tears slowly gathered in her eyes. All her short life she had been first with him, the little queen of his heart. From some dim recess of her brain (where do we keep them, I wonder, those words fired at random to come back and hurt?) she remembered a stray conversation with one of the Dragon's friends, a low-class one. An insinuating smile; a remark on "a fine, big Miss;" and, "Ye'll hae a lad noo. Wha's your sweetheart?" And her own dignified answer:

"The Laird is my lad. But my father is my sweetheart."

Then the vulgar laugh.

"Wait till your paw-paw gets anither wife, and *you'll* no be his sweetheart ony langer."

He *had* another wife. He had just put the ring on his bride's finger. And already he had forgotten his little sweetheart of the lonely and lean years. Was it true? Elspeth wondered.

They knelt again. Lower and lower sank the flower-crowned head of the bridegroom's maid, bending over her bouquet of forget-me-nots.

A thought suddenly flashed across her. It was naughty in church, but she remembered how the flowers always spoke true. The Laird had told her to listen at all times, and in all circumstances, to the voice of Nature, for she never lied. How often, on the gowan-spangled brae in front of the Laird's house, had the rich, yellow buttercups, held under his shaven chin, told her that he liked butter and cream? How often had the big dog-daisies gathered in the fields, and the wee, crimson-tipped ones, told her that he loved her? She would try the forget-me-nots. In church, in that sacred place, they would be sure to tell her true.

She was kneeling quite close to the bride, and was screened from the view of the other guests by the large and portly figure of the mauve lady. A corner of the bride's train, ruched with white *lisse* rose-petals, with here and there a crystal dewdrop glittering amongst them, lay at her feet.

Elspeth thought the dewdrops looked like tears. She bent lower over her bouquet, and singling out a large forget-me-not blossom let the petals drop, one by one, amongst the rose-leaves and dew-drops on the bridal train.

"He forgets me, forgets me not, forgets me, forgets me not, forgets me," she repeated slowly to herself.

Her heart sank at the result.

But that was only one time of doing it. The daisies often said the Laird did not love her to begin with. The Spirit of Divination was often in a contrary, teasing mood. She would try again.

"He forgets me, forgets me not, forgets me, forgets me not, forgets me."

Elspeth stared, horror-stricken. It could not be. Perhaps it was because she was naughty, doing it in church. The third time might change and then she would have another chance. Once more:

"He forgets me, forgets me not, forgets me, forgets me not, forgets me."

It was true then. He *had* forgotten her. For, alas! the poor little mystic flowers had an unequal number of petals, and if she had pulled the whole

bouquet to pieces every blossom would, probably, have answered in the same way, unless she had begun her incantation differently.

A smart tap on the arm from the mauve lady roused her. Every one was standing up now except herself. She rose slowly from her knees. Her eyes were dim with tears, well-nigh to brimming over. The ceremony was concluded. Her father and stepmother were now man and wife.

They passed with the witnesses into the vestry. Elspeth saw nothing. In a dream they went out, and in a dream they returned. Forget-me-not petals lay unseen on the bride's train, nestling beside the rose-petals and the dewdrops which looked like tears.

In a dream she saw the procession form again, and took her solitary place at the end of it. She never saw the bride smiling and bowing to her friends, nor the bridegroom, triumphant over the successful passing of his ordeal, looking round for herself, for in her misery she had hidden herself more than ever behind that conveniently stout lady. He had forgotten her. That was all. Nothing else mattered.

The bridal procession passed down the aisle

again, the bridegroom's maid still walking behind, alone, with head erect and dewy eyes. No one interfered. They did not know if that was meant to be her place or not. She was alone, forgotten. Some thought it looked rather strange to see the smallest bridesmaid at the end, attired the same, yet differently to the rest, but they put it down to some unknown Scottish fashion.

The carriages filled up and rolled away. Elspeth was crowded in with Julia and another bridesmaid beside another strange lady. The child gazed out of the carriage window in a bewildered fashion.

The bells were now crashing out a merry peal. To Elspeth they rang a knell—the knell of her passing childhood. Henceforth, she was but a schoolgirl, an atom in the world of ordinary girls. To be teased and made fun of; to be made to submit to all the annoyances and petty tyrannies which girls can inflict, when they like, on one of their number, who is much younger in every way than the rest, and whom they think “odd.” She was no one, henceforth. The bells were tolling for the passing of Elspeth Arnot, Queen of Three

Hearts, from the kingdom of her childhood into obscurity.

Julia began to educate her by slowly rubbing a slim, nearly full-grown foot up and down the child's white kid shoes, with a malicious expression on her face. She had seen the pirouetting in front of the drawing-room and guessed its object. She murmured aloud:

"Conceited imp! You were *not* a bridesmaid, you see, after all. I told you so. *Carrots!*"

Elspeth never heard her. She simply gazed in front of her, dumb and unseeing. I doubt if she even felt the rubbing up and down and soiling of her precious shoes. Her body was in the carriage, but her spirit was far away from the present.

Galloping on moorland paths on Donald Dhu's shaggy back, held on by the firm white hand of one true love—she could feel the pressure of his ring on her arm. Roaming with him amongst the bees and butterflies, amid the scent of the wild thyme, hand in hand, while the pony browsed amongst the heather. Dancing in his study—for it was he who taught her dancing, and her French dancing master had an easy time of it. It was the Laird, with the blood of courtiers in his veins,

who taught her to dance as he had danced himself in the days of his youth, although he never held up the skirts of his coat-tails as M. le Comte did. (For, of course, the dancing master was a French count in disguise.)

Sitting in a rocking-boat with her other true love holding on grimly to the stern, with slippery fish of her catching on the seat beside him, choosing her awkward rowing, with probably death at the end of it, rather than life without her. How far away she was from those old loves, and that old happy, ideal life! Even the Dragon had been but an angel in disguise.

Oh, to be anywhere, everywhere, rather than following in the joyous bridal train of the third, her best beloved and dearest of all—who had forgotten her!

And through it all the bells—crashing, tolling bells—kept ringing—ringing—as the waters of Life closed round her childish heart, swirling, eddying, carrying her on with a rush, as the great tidal river rushed under the bridge on its way to the sea near her home.

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But did he really forget? Or was it only the imagination of a romantic child's loving and fool-

ish heart—some phantasy of the brain pertaining to the natural inheritance of that strangely complex temperament which we call the Celtic? Or was it really a premonition handed down from Highland ancestors in the shape of second sight and, therefore, a true glimpse into the future?

Ah, that is another story and belongs to a new reign. The Queen is dead. Long live the Queen.

In real life men do forget. And women too, for that matter. Only in the heart of the child dwell the never-to-be-forgotten memories, laid away in lavender and rue. To be taken out, perhaps, and unfolded, only after the rue has dropped to pieces and all its bitterness is gone. But the sweet fragrance of the lavender remains for ever, emblem of the Eternal, which is the Heart of True Love.

AFTERMATH

AND now it is eventide, the cool of the day,
when God walks in gardens.

A gentle breeze has risen. The evening star shines through the rustling leaves of the lime-trees at my gate. There is a touch of autumn in the air. Sunflowers lean their wistful heads over the wall to the west, where the sun has sunk reluctantly into the margin of the sea.

It is not a part of the country for fine sunsets, but there is a slight, rosy afterglow lingering still on the horizon.

The lilies are over in my garden, although roses and late sweet-peas still shed their sweet autumnal fragrance on the air.

A pale, silvery disk of crescent moon rises over the ridge of white cliffs.

I am alone—yet not alone.

It is also the quiet eventide of a woman's life, when the clouds have all rolled away. Long shafts of golden light, shining over the purple hills of the past, form pathways from past to

present, from present to future. It is as the clear shining which cometh after rain. The pilgrim but rests at sundown in the arbour prepared for weary travellers by the Lord of the Way.

Soon winter will be here, when I must lie enclosed within the four walls of an invalid's room, a prisoner of hope. But now I am still on my garden couch, watching the evening star, and listening—for what?

I am not ashamed even yet, in my solitary and unromantic middle age, to dream dreams and see visions. As in the old far-off days phantom forms guided my childish feet over flowery meads and thorny paths, so now they wait just beyond the greenery at my gate to keep tryst with me. The trysting-place is just beyond the lime-trees.

I see the Doctor of Thunders, his leonine expression softened by his new views from the other side, his range of vision altered in the proximity of that Light which never shone on sea or land.

Hendry, of the radiant personality, surrounded by crowds whom he has helped there by his beautiful teaching of the Gospel of Love. His magnetic laugh echoes even into my quiet garden. The little brother, whom he holds by the hand, is my phantom, Freddy.

The Laird, rumpling up his silver curls, in his old, familiar fashion, half-shy, half-nervous, as was his wont when waiting to receive a much-loved, long-expected friend.

Grandfather, the Elder, with his long, white, "terrible-straight" hair blowing in the celestial breezes. They will not lose the beautiful silver hair in the new life, I think.

"Fair was the crown to behold, and beauty its poorest part—

At once the scar of the wound, and the order pinned on the heart."

I can see many more. But behind these a little I see the Dragon. Yes, the Dragon—changed, her self-confidence gone, her stern lips relaxed, even breaking into a smile. A little wintry, perhaps, her personality not altogether different even yet, but modified, as it was the last time I saw her in life.

"Forgive me," she cried then, holding out her trembling, aged hands. "Forgive me for being so severe. My views were narrow. They are altered now. I wanted you to grow up good. I knew nothing at all about children. I thought chastisement was the right way to bring them up, the only way to cast out original sin and to make

their calling and election sure. Forgive me! Tell me you bear me no malice. I loved you all the time, but I had been brought up so strictly myself, that I thought it was the only way."

No, dear, altered Dragon. I bear you no malice. Only love matters. I remember your prayers, and tears, and joyful thanksgivings over any faint flutterings of grace shown in my wayward heart, as well as your whippings. And if, on looking back, some of them appear to me to have been unmerited, a good many of them were richly deserved. Therefore we are quits.

But there is one amongst these waiting loved ones in the forefront, close to the gate, of whom I cannot write. The youngest, the most radiant of them all, the latest gone. She slipped out of my garden with the lilies. She, too, is waiting for me, peering eagerly round the corner and saying:

"Is she not coming *yet?*"

She is holding on lovingly to my mother's hand, this child of a later generation than my own. There is a shimmer of gold and copper-red where their two heads are touching. My mother is smiling at her eagerness, holding her back a little, and replying:

"Soon, soon. Perhaps this winter."

306 A GARDEN OF SPICES

And I, listening, echo back from earth with rapture:

“Perhaps this winter.”

Then the long-caged prisoner will be free, and the shadows of the prison-house will enfold me no more.

For the evening brings all Home.

And the Garden of Peace, with the Tree of Life standing in the midst thereof, is the trysting-place which is just beyond the lime-trees.

THE END

